

Stressed-Out Pets

Natural Ways to Calm Fear and Anxiety

by Sandra Murphy



While most American pets live on easy street, with meals, treats, exercise outings and affection provided, the good life also poses challenges—dogs and cats can get stressed.

“Basic stress is fear-based. Separation or isolation anxiety requires in-depth training,” says JennaLee Gallicchio, a certified separation anxiety trainer who uses scientific and hands-off techniques at her All Stars Dog Training, in Bedminster, New Jersey. She authors a bestselling series that was launched with *The Secret to Getting Your Dog to Do What You Want*.

A drug like Reconcile, the pet version of Prozac, looks like a quick fix, but can bring many harmful side effects. Laurel Braitman, Ph.D., of Sausalito, California, bestselling author of *Animal Madness: How Anxious Dogs, Compulsive Parrots, and Elephants in Recovery Help Us Understand Ourselves*, estimates

SIGNS OF PET STRESS

- ✓ Aggression toward people or other animals
- ✓ Digestive problems
- ✓ Excessive barking/meowing
- ✓ Forgetful of housetraining
- ✓ Increased sleep
- ✓ Isolation
- ✓ Loss of appetite
- ✓ Pacing
- ✓ Pulling out fur

that 70 million U.S. dogs are given the same drugs their humans use for anxiety or depression. Considering the potential dangers, such drugs should only be used briefly as a last resort with

veterinary supervision to ensure the proper dosage based on age, size and temperament. There are more natural and safer alternatives.

Common Stressors

Dogs hear sounds at four times the distance we do; cats hear even better. Thunderstorms, fireworks, traffic, TV, music and children can unnerve them. Add in a new home, baby, another pet or anticipation of car rides associated with fear of the veterinarian and even normally mellow pets can get upset.

Irregular work hours undermine established routines. Pet or human health issues, plus household drama, add special reasons to fret. Pets separated from their litters too early can experience anxiety as adults.

Stress Less Strategies

“Let your dog have a space where he can retreat when he’s had enough,” advises Dr. Carol Osborne, owner of Ohio’s Chagrin Falls Veterinary Center & Pet Clinic. She recommends Bach’s Five Flower Formula, diluted chamomile essential oil or a pet-safe tincture of the Chinese herb skullcap for additional relief.

Dogs like routine. “Regular exercise helps, including two, 20-minute daily walks. A tired pet is a happy pet,” Osborne says. “Walks can eliminate stress and anxiety by 50 percent for you both.”

“Cats need exercise that mimics hunting; cats stare and plan, stalk or chase, pounce and grab,” says Marci Koski, certified by the Animal Behavior Institute and owner of Feline Behavior Solutions, in Vancouver, Washington. “An indoor cat’s prey drive can be met with interactive toys.” A place to climb or hide and a window with a view will help as will periodic playtime catching moving toys; with nothing to catch, a laser pointer’s red dots are frustrating for a cat and a potential danger to its eyes.

“Two of my large dogs were anxious during a three-day power outage,” says Kimberly Gauthier, a dog nutrition blogger at *KeepTheTailWagging.com*, in

Marysville, Washington. “I add Ewegurt, a sheep’s milk yogurt, to their food to calm them when needed.”

Clicker training rewards desired behaviors. “Ralphie, an Italian greyhound mix, was protective, but also fearful; before going outside, we’d practice sit, stay and come using a click/treat. Now he sees other dogs without reacting,” relates Katrina Wilhelm, a naturopathic physician and owner of *DrKatrinaWilhelm.com*, in Lake Oswego, Oregon. It works when someone knocks on the door, too.

Soothing music covers the sounds of storms and fireworks, counsels Lisa Spector, an award-winning concert pianist in Half Moon Bay, California, who creates the *Through a Dog’s Ear* clinically tested music series to relieve pet anxiety, inclusive of cats. “Although many holistic animal lovers want natural stress relievers, few think of auditory options,” she says.

Getting kitty into her carrier to go to the vet isn’t always easy. London’s Simon Tofield, animator and cartoonist for *Simon’s Cats* videos and books, suggests making the crate comfy and leaving it out so the cat gets used to it; keeping it out of reach of curious dogs at the vet’s office; and only opening

it upon arrival in the exam room. His local vet staff explains more at Tinyurl.com/CatVetProtocol.

New View

“Stressors for dogs and cats are different. As a veterinarian, I explain situations from the animal’s perspective,” says Jennifer Quammen, with the Grants Lick Veterinary Hospital, in Butler, Kentucky. “I say, ‘From the cat’s point of view...’ As the animal advocate, I feel it’s my professional obligation.”

“We bring pets into our world and expect them to adjust. Dogs, in particular, try so hard,” says Spector. They need our attention, shared activities and most of all, our understanding.

Connect with Sandra Murphy at StLouisFreelanceWriter@mindspring.com