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## NOISE PHOBIAS

Noise phobias are very common in dogs; the most common cause is fireworks or thunderstorms. Some signs your dog has a noise phobia are urinating and defecating, panting, pacing, digging, trying to seek out their owner, trembling and generally destructive behaviour in the presence of a noise. Around New Year's Eve or after a big storm, the RSPCA, Council's and vet clinics get inundated with calls due to dogs jumping their fences, being hit by cars or injuring themselves trying to escape the noise.

Fears of loud or unexpected noises are triggered by what's called the "orienting response", which is the brain's mechanism for being aware. When our dogs hear certain sounds, the brain instantly processes them to determine whether they might signal danger.

If you have a young puppy, get them used to loud noises as early as possible to prevent them from developing this phobia. Regular exercise plays a valuable role in preventing noise phobias. A dog that is walked regularly is generally more relaxed and therefore more likely to remain calm during scary noises. The more they are walked, the more scary noises they get exposed to, also preventing this behaviour.

The next step is "crate" training your dog. Doing this gives it a place to go to sleep and to be calm, and it will associate the crate with positive experiences. It is a good idea if this is placed near where your dog normally goes during the noise phobia, as the dog already regards this as a safer place to be. Leave the door open and put treats in it, along with favorite toys and perhaps a blanket the dog likes to sleep on. Allow your dog to go into the crate voluntarily and reward this. Play with your dog, give it treats and encourage it to sleep in the crate. The relatively confined space will make your dog feel safe. Once your puppy has learned that this is a safe place it will want to be here during times of fear.

In dogs already displaying a fear of noises, desensitisation techniques can be used to treat the behaviour. They do however take some time and perseverance. You can buy a commercially recorded soundtrack of noises and play the noise on a low volume for 3-5 minutes. Gradually increase the volume over a period of time until the pet is non-reactive at full volume.

Dog appeasing pheromones (D.A.P.) have been shown to reduce signs of noise phobias in dogs. D.A.P. is a synthetic pheromone that mimics that of a lactating female within three to five days after giving birth. The pheromones the female generate relax her puppies and give them a sense of reassurance. You can purchase D.A.P. from veterinary clinics in either a diffuser or a spray. It is also useful for settling dogs and puppies into a new environment.

If your pet is frightened by a noise, do not punish them, as it is likely to aggravate the condition. Do not comfort your pet for fearful behaviour as this may reinforce the un-desirable behaviour.

If your dog is displaying severe signs of noise related anxiety it would be advised you see your Veterinarian or Veterinary Behavioural Specialist who will advise you of the best way to manage your pet's condition.

With proper training, socialisation and mental stimulation most pets never develop any kind of noise related phobias.

Written by Liana Corbett, Puppy Pre-School Co-ordinator, Animal Medical Centre