



## Behavior and Training Department

### Resources

#### Anxious Dogs

Some dogs are very anxious in nature. This may show up as hyperactive behavior, mouthing, shedding, pacing, environmental sensitivity, etc. There are many ways you can help your anxious dog. One way is to slowly **desensitize** them to stimuli that triggers their anxiety. This should be done very gradually and preferably with the oversight of a behaviorist. **Counter conditioning** can also be an important tool. This is when you present something positive in the presence of something that may worry the dog. Example: The dog is anxious about other dogs so you offer tasty treats every time you see another dog thereby creating a positive association with dogs. **General obedience training** is also recommended. Putting your dog through his/her paces can help take their mind off what is bothering them and give them some focus and direction to all that anxious energy.

Perhaps the most important thing you can do is ensure your dog receives lots of **exercise**. Exercise is a productive way to help your dog burn off anxious energy. A tired, relaxed dog is a great alternative to an anxious, worried one.

Establish a **predictable routine**. A dog that knows when it is time for walks and time for dinner will have less to worry about in his environment.

Limit exposure to **triggering situations**. Does your dog's anxiety go sky high when he is taken to a busy park, or where lots of other dogs are? Try limiting these experiences until appropriate desensitization and counter conditioning can take place. Even with these methods in place, some dogs may be much happier not being a social butterfly out in the world and may prefer the comforts of home.

**DAP** or Dog Appeasing Pheromones can be used to help soothe an anxious dog. They can be used by way of a plug in that fits into a regular electrical outlet, a collar the dog wears or as a portable spray. Adaptil is one brand name.

**Melatonin**-Melatonin has been shown to calm the nerves, reduce anxiety, facilitate deep sleep amongst other benefits. Melatonin given once per day can greatly help your dog. While it is sold over the counter, be sure to talk to your vet before administering.

**Anti-anxiety meds**- Some dogs may greatly benefit from medication to help break through their intense anxiety. Medication should be used in conjunction with behavior modification techniques. Axitane is one over the counter medication.

**Massage**- Slow, soothing massage helps people relax and it can help your dog too. Quiet time spent in your company can greatly help your dog to relax. Teaching a "Zen down" or Karen Overall's "Relaxation Protocol" can help too.



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**Calming Cap-** For some dogs specific situations such as riding in the car or going to the vet can invoke great anxiety. A calming cap is a cap that covers the dogs eyes and filters unwanted visual stimuli which can help calm the dog. [www.thundershirt.com](http://www.thundershirt.com)

**Diet-** Just like with kids, if your dog's diet consists of junk food, he may be hyperactive and even more anxious. Read the ingredients on the label and be sure that the first items listed sound like food you would want to eat. Look for meat products (ex: salmon vs salmon meal) and vegetables and fruits. Avoid grains.

**Flower Essences-**Bach flower essences such as Rescue Remedy have also been reported to be very helpful when working with anxious dogs.

**Thundershirt-** A Thundershirt applies gentle, constant pressure and can help calm an anxious dog. While used often for thunder phobic dogs, it can also be very useful for dogs who are in general fearful and anxious.

**Scent work-**Scenting is a great way for an anxious dog to relieve themselves of stress. It has the ability to both physically and mentally wear the dog out while allowing them to utilize a natural talent-their nose! In scent work there is little interference or input from the handler which allows the dog to take part in a sport with very little pressure and one in which they do not need to interact with other dogs.

**Relaxation Protocol-** Dr. Karen Overall has developed a relaxation protocol which can help anxious dog. <http://www.dogdaysnw.com/doc/OverallRelaxationProtocol.pdf>

For the **sound sensitive dog** you may want to try playing the C.D. **Through a Dogs Ear** or purchase a **white noise machine or fan** to help cover up sounds that may trigger your dog.

When dealing with training and behavioral issues it is advised to get professional assistance.

Sonoma Humane offers a variety of training classes, behavioral consultations, in-home training, and private sessions.

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