

UNDER THE WEATHER

Fear, Loud and Clear

One of the most common behaviour problems pet parents face, especially in a city like Mumbai, is noise phobia. This sometimes co-exists with another behaviour problem like separation anxiety. These problems should be evaluated and assessed early in order to get the best response to treatment. Treatment options include behaviour modification therapy, counter conditioning and desensitisation, DAP ((Dog Appeasing Pheromone) diffusers, homeopathic medicines and allopathic medicines.

Desensitisation and counter conditioning involves exposing the pet to lower levels of the sound that he is scared of. So you need to record firecrackers on a recorder or get a recording of a noisy Ganesh immersion. Play that CD at a very low, almost inaudible volume. Calm behaviour should be rewarded with praise or treats. The volume should be increased gradually, over days. Do not increase the volume too fast. This is the most common mistake people make. After several short sessions of 3-5 minutes



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each, per day, for a few days, begin to increase the volume. If your dog slowly reacts, ignore him, turn the sound off, and restart at the previous volume that he did not react to, and start over.

DAP diffusers are pheromones, or anxiety reducing hormones used continuously either in a plug-in diffuser form or as a collar. The diffusers cover an area of 600 sq ft. DAP collars should have a tight fit, with only 1 finger gap between collar and skin, since they are activated by body heat. They should remain dry, as moisture reduces their effect.

Treatment:

Homeopathic medicines: Give 4 pills of Phosphorus plus or Aconitum napellus, 30c every 15 minutes till the pet calms down.

Herbalists swear by Bachs Rescue remedy which is a flower essence blend used to manage stress and restore calm. Add 3 to 4 drops to your dog's drinking water and do that everytime you change the water in the bowl. Do this for a week before, and 2 to 3 days after the noisy days. If your pet is extremely stressed, put a few drops directly on his tongue.

Change in environment: I do recommend a change in environment for pets who are extremely fearful of loud sounds, since treatment is often frustrating and ineffective in some patients. Either keep them in the quietest room with soothing music playing, or take them out of town if you can manage.

Exercise: Make sure your pet is adequately exercised during festival season at a time when it is not noisy outside. Exercise increases serotonin levels and keeps them calmer and less fearful.

Allopathic medicines: There are several drugs used alone, or in combination with other treatment protocols to alleviate noise and/or separation anxiety in dogs. Some of the commonly used medicines are Diazepam, Alprazolam, Clomipramine, Amitriptyline and Fluoxetine.

There is no guarantee that a noise phobia can be totally resolved, but in many instances, it can be managed with the right combination of treatment modalities. The effectiveness of treatment depends on a number of factors including the severity of the phobia, how long your pet has had it and the amount of effort the pet parent is prepared to commit to the behaviour modification techniques.

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