

Take the Scary out of Summer Storms

Guelph, ON

Do you find your dog cowering in a corner after a clap of thunder? Does he pace, drool or whine when there is a storm pending? If so, your pooch may be suffering from storm phobia.

Fear and anxiety in pets are often overlooked or misunderstood. A phobia is intense fear that, if allowed to continue untreated, can lead to diminished quality of life. The good news is there is support available, sometimes you just need help getting started.

Practice empathy. Empathy is critical for speculation on the source and rationale behind your dog's distress. When we approach problems from an empathetic viewpoint, we are more patient and are less likely to respond negatively.

Talk it out with your veterinary team. Consider referral to a veterinary behaviourist. Dogs with phobias often benefit from medication. Don't let any stigma surrounding "anti-depressant" use in pets prevent you from providing your dog relief. It is important never start your pet on any supplement without checking with your veterinarian first.

Avoid common pitfalls. Punishment should never be used since it will only increase rather than decrease your pet's distress. On the other hand, take care not to inadvertently reinforce fearful behaviour. When you try to soothe your dog, he may interpret this as praise for displaying fearful behaviour. Then what should you do? Act normal. Unload the dishwasher, fold laundry, read a book. When your dog sees you performing routine tasks, it signals to him that he doesn't need to be afraid.

Provide refuge. Many dogs will benefit from a safe place they can hide in when frightened. Your dog must be allowed access to his refuge at all times. Here are a few tips in creating your pet's own "Bolt-Hole":

1. Provide access to a window-less room (such as the laundry room) or one with heavy curtains that block out light
2. Play music. Classical music has been shown to help calm dogs. Alternatively, white noise (such as an exhaust fan) can help drown out external noise
3. Pile up blankets for hiding under
4. Include an article of your clothing – your scent can help calm your dog
5. Plug a dog-appeasing pheromone diffuser into an outlet

For more information:

Colleen McElwain
Canadian Animal Health Institute
(519) 763-7777



This destructive boy isn't a "bad dog". He is a fearful dog. Empathy is needed, not punishment.