



Campbelltown Veterinary Hospital

Veterinary Surgeons

Gary Ashton B.V.Sc. Dip. Appl.Sc.

Lisa Henshaw B.V.Sc. MANZCVS (Behaviour)

www.campbelltownvet.com.au

email: ctownvet@bigpond.net.au

15 Chamberlain Street

(P.O. Box 663)

Phone: (02) 4626 4222

Fax: (02) 4628 2322

Counter-conditioning and desensitisation to noises

If your dog is afraid of a loud noise such as thunder or fire-works we want to try to gradually desensitise the dog to the sound and counter-condition the sound to become associated with rewards when the dog behaves calmly.

We can provide you with a CD recording of several loud noises including thunder and fire-works. The likelihood of success depends on many things including your dog's reaction to the CD when played loudly on a good quality hi-fi system. You may need to experiment with different sound systems or location of the sound. If your dog does not react to the CD it is unlikely to have any effect. Choose one sound to start the program with and concentrate on this one first. Other noises can be worked on later.

Some dogs become frightened well before the storm begins in response to other environmental triggers such as barometric pressure change, atmospheric electrostatic charge or possibly low frequency noise. They can hear more acutely than humans so will hear thunder well before us. Obviously we can only desensitise and counter-condition the stimuli that we can reproduce. It is still worthwhile to do this as hopefully the dog will become less frightened when a storm is close and therefore may also be less anxious as one approaches.

Get prepared before you start. Keep a record of your session dates, duration, loudness of CD, treats used and the dog's responses. Try to do at least two sessions each day between 5-30 minutes each. Decide what behaviour you are going to ignore and what you are going to reward. Use high value food rewards such as chicken, cheese or devon. Start by playing the CD very quietly and reward calm quiet behaviour. Gradually increase the noise level by the smallest increment possible. Begin each new session at two levels below that reached previously. If the dog becomes at all anxious decrease the level by 4 increments and try again more slowly. Proceed gradually until you reach the maximum sound level then try changing the location of the sound system to other rooms, outside the house, in the garage or in a box etc. If the dog responds anxiously work through the routine in each new location.

It is important that while you are doing this training your dog should not experience a frightening episode involving the relevant noise. Therefore choose your timing carefully or ask us about sedation for your pet if you are expecting a storm or fireworks etc. The program has a better chance of success when used in conjunction with behaviour-modifying medication. Ask us for details. This system will not work for every dog for various reasons. To prevent injury or undue stress we may recommend sedation or anxiety-reducing medications. Your dog would need a thorough medical examination and possibly blood tests before we could prescribe any medication.