

Managing Problems.... Separation Anxiety

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Introduction

- Anxiety:
 - General reaction of uncertainty that may be acute or chronic
- Separation Related Behavior:
 - Behaviors that occur when dog is separated from owner, may or may not be associated with anxiety

Signs of Anxiety

- Dilated pupils
- Tense muscles, trembling
- Panting
- Salivation
- Vocalization

Signs of Anxiety

- Destructive behavior
- Inappetance
- Urination/defecation
- Repetitive behavior
- Displacement behavior

Displacement Behavior

Separation Anxiety

- A response of anxiety from the dog when separated from owners
 - When owner truly away
 - When only one owner is gone

Causes

- Social nature of dogs and their attachment to people
- Inheritance; inadvertent breeding selection
- Stress
- Lack or prior habituation to absences

Symptoms

Destruction

- Personal property
- Entry/exit points, escape behavior

Courtesy of Dr. Patricia Pryor

Symptoms

- House soiling
- Vocalization
- Salivation
- Lack of interest in food or toys when owner is gone

Symptoms

- Whine, pant, pace before owner leaves
- Excessive excitement upon owner's return (jump, whine, run in circles, etc.)
- Follows owner around when home

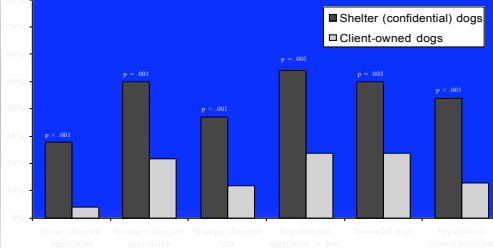
Diagnosis*

- Rule out other causes of problems
 - Boredom
 - Medical Problems
 - Barrier frustration
 - Other causes of inappropriate elimination (urine marking, incomplete housetraining)
 - Anxiety due to trigger other than separation

Accurate Identification of Separation Anxiety in Shelters

- Assessment of behavior when alone in a room?
- Historical information?
- Behavior in kennels?

Prevalence of Behavior Problems



Evaluation of a behavioral assessment questionnaire for use in the characterization of behavioral problems of dogs relinquished to animal shelters. Segerson, et al. JAVMA, Dec 2005, Vol. 227, No. 11: 1755-1761.

Separation-Related Behavior

- Highly significant ($p < .001$) difference in reporting of separation behaviors in shelter vs. client owned dogs
- Suggests that separation anxiety in dogs adopted from shelters is often a pre-existing condition



Barrier Frustration

- Anxiety secondary to barrier, NOT separation from caretaker
- Dog might display behavior in presence of owner
- Once free of barrier (i.e., kennel), anxiety resolves

Evaluation Aids

- Problem USUALLY most severe when owner first gone (within first 30 minutes)
- Video often ESSENTIAL

Treatment

- **Environmental management**
- **Behavior modification**
- **Prevent anxiety from occurring**
- **Pharmacotherapy (Drugs)**
- **Combinations of above (best outcome)**

Environmental Management

- Regular exercise/interaction
- Avoid leaving dog alone (day care, pet sitter)

Behavior Modification Nothing in Life is Free

- Dog must 'work' for everything he/she gets
- Ignore dog when he/she is asking for attention
- Call dog to you when it is calm, relaxed-ask dog to perform a cue
- Reward dog for good behavior with food, attention, a walk, going outside, etc.,

Behavior Modification Departures

- Turn off TV, radio, lights, etc. at least 30 min before departure to avoid triggering anxiety
- If must leave at home, avoid giving attention (no talking, petting, playing) for 30 minutes prior to departure

Behavior Modification Departures

- Desensitization to departure cues
 - Keys
 - Alarm clock
 - Clothing
 - Morning routine
 - Shoes

Behavior Modification Departure Training

- Program of gradual desensitization to process of leaving the house
- Gradually longer periods of separation from owner

Behavior Modification Mat training

- Create 'safe area' where dog always gets rewarded when he enters it
- Train dog to stay on mat/bed while gradually moving further away from him/her
- Dog gets special reward, only when on mat

Behavior Modification Returning home

- Ignore dog when return home until dog is calm, relaxed

Other forms of treatment

- Role of punishment
 - NONE!!
- Crating- oftentimes will increase anxiety, but may work
- Get another pet- not reliable, don't do it!

Other Forms of Treatment

- Olfactory stimulation
 - Calming effect of Lavender, Chamomile
 - DAP
- Rescue Remedy
 - No proven effectiveness
- Dietary Modification (Tryptophan)
 - No proven effectiveness

Medical Management

- DAP-Dog appeasing pheromone
 - Mimics natural pheromones of lactating Bitch.
 - May provide a sense of well-being and reassurance and alleviate fear and stress.
 - Anecdotal reports; no extensive controlled studies performed.

Medical Management

- Drugs are rarely successful when used alone
- Must have full medical work-up before administering drugs
- Drugs are a 'band-aid'- do not resolve problems, but reduce them so that behavior modification can be more effective

Medical Management

- TCA's (Clomicalm®)
- SSRI's (fluoxetine, sertraline, ...)
 - Clomipramine- only licensed drug for canine separation anxiety
 - Anti-anxiety medications
 - Increase serotonin levels in the brain
 - Other effects unknown
 - 3-8 weeks before effective
 - SSRI's possess less sedating side effects than TCA's

Medical Management

- Benzodiazepines (valium, alprazolam)
 - Short-term anxiety relief
 - Short-acting, works immediately
 - Can cause paradoxical excitation
 - Works best when given 30 minutes before onset of anxiety

Prognosis

- Duration of therapy:
 - usually 1-2 months and gradually reduce if dog is doing well
 - Relapses tend to be more difficult to manage
- Outcome:
 - Behavior/environmental management alone can lead to improvement in as many as 84% of dogs
 - Medications may expedite response to Tx

Questions?

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