

HELPING DOGS WITH A FEAR OF THUNDERSTORMS

by Bonnie Becker as posted to the Cairn Rescue Mentoring list. Bonnie has a rescue boy "Elf" who was adopted with a chronic fear of thunderstorms.

1. There is a recommendation to mist the dog with water, possibly with Rescue Remedy in it. This is to prevent or cut down on static electricity building up on the dog. Another possibility is a grooming antistatic spray.
2. Some dogs want to stay in a bathtub during storms because the water pipes are grounded. Owners don't put any water in the tub and stay in the room reading.
3. Aromatherapy may help some dogs: www.patriciamcconnell.com
4. There's body wrapping called TTouch video: www.youtube.com
5. Aside from desensitizing the dog from the noise with a tape of CD of a storm, you can desensitize for the lightning with a strobe light.
6. There are Homeopathic remedies to try. I think the main one is Phosphorus and there are Homeopathic vets who will do phone consultations if you don't have one nearby.
7. There are the Bach Flower Essences of Rescue Remedy and also Mimulus.
8. There are some herbs or herbal mixtures which may help. I've seen Valerian mentioned. I've read that Kava Kava may not be a good idea.
9. There is quite an assortment of drugs to try if you are willing to use them on your dog. If your vet offers one and only one drug to try, check with another vet. Acepromazine is NOT recommended for terriers..
10. Personally, I've had reasonable success with half of a Children's Chewable Benadryl *and* a Calms Forte or two. I checked with my vet to be sure it doesn't contain Xylitol (which is poisonous to dogs).
11. There is Melatonin (info found on Google.com). I'm trying Elf on a dosage of 1 mg of this because it sometimes halts the fearful behavior after a small number of doses. Mary Straus has excellent advise.
12. Mary Straus has excellent anxiety medication advise on her website: www.dogaware.com

You can't "baby" a dog with anxiety ("Oh you poor little darling!"). You have to act calm (it's no big deal) or jolly (wow, look at the neat lightening)! My routine now is to shut all the drapes and put all the lights on (harder to see flashes from outside). I put on the radio *very loud* and have put on the dishwasher or washer and dryer (in the basement, but what the heck). I vacuumed with Elf in his crate the other day as he was only barking. I leash Elf to his harness and hook the leash around my waist, sit down in big, comfy rocker, read, and yawn a lot (a calming signal).

I think these are most of the options I've seen. Elf is now able to go outside to potty when there are mild rumbles to be heard. When he first came to live here, he was way too busy yelling at the rumbles to go potty so this is obvious progress. It's recommended that if your dog *loves* someone to play games with, do that as long as possible to keep him distracted. If he *loves* clicker training, do that. There may be some very special treat that he gets *only* when there is a storm. Eventually he may associate storms with good things rather than bad. I hope something here is helpful.