



Dawson Creek Veterinary Clinic

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Thunderstorm Phobia in Dogs

Written by Dr. Zoe Ross



Photo credit Sabrina Bergeron (Sabrina May Photography)

We have recently had some big thunderstorms in the Peace which have provided us with some pretty amazing light shows in the evenings but have also resulted in some very scared canine friends.

Thunderstorm phobia (or fear of thunder storms) occurs in dogs. It can occur at any age and in any breed of dog. Dogs with phobia show signs of anxiety during storms such as whining, shaking, hiding, urinating or defecating in the house, pacing, panting and sometimes destructive behavior if they are trying to get out of an area they are confined in. It is important to understand that these dogs are truly afraid and are not being “bad dogs” when they are displaying these signs. You should try to reassure them and not discipline them for this behavior.

There are some things that you can do to help your dog out during thunder storms. You can try to minimize their exposure to the noise and lights of the storm by putting them in a darkened room with the blinds closed or a sound proof area. Sometimes using white noise can help to mask the sounds of the thunder so there is less stimulus for them. You may notice that there is a place that your dog likes to hide during a storm. If it is

ok for them to be there, then make sure they have access to that location. Some dogs will try to run away during storms and then they are at risk of getting lost or injured so it is important to make sure they are in a place where they can't run away and get hurt. It can also be helpful to provide them with some distraction during the storm such as a treat dispensing toy such as a kong with frozen peanut butter inside it or a chew toy. Playing with your pet may also provide a distraction for them.

There are special shirts called Thundershirts which can help relax your pet as well. These shirts help provide gentle steady pressure. Research has shown that this type of pressure can help dogs with anxiety problems in a similar manner as it can help people such as infants that like swaddling and people with autism that respond to gentle pressure or weighted vests. Dog Appeasing Pheromone (DAP) can also have a calming effect and is available as a spray or diffuser. This is a pheromone that is produced by lactating female dogs and helps calm their puppies. The essential oil Lavender may also have a calming effect but be aware that our pets have a much keener sense of smell than us so be careful not to use too much.

In some cases dogs can be so fearful that they are in danger of harming themselves or as I mentioned earlier can be destructive when trying to get out of the house or kennel. In some situations there are medications that can help with anxiety in your pet. Unfortunately most of the time these medications have to be given on a daily basis during the summer months because often by the time we realize there is a storm coming, the dog has already reached a very fearful and anxious state and often giving them medication at that stage isn't very helpful. If you are concerned about your pet's phobia and are considering medication, you should book a consultation with your veterinarian so they can discuss the medication options with you and come up with an appropriate plan for your pet.

Our clinic carries both kongs and DAP in stock. Thundershirts can be purchased online.