



Helping Pets Adapt to our Quarantine

Written by: Sam Kabbel, CPDT-KSA, President, Pet Behavior Solutions

www.petbehaviorsolutions.com

The additional time spent with our dogs has led to some interesting issues that have arisen during this unprecedented time in our lives.

The most common issue for which we are asked to help with is dog reactivity. There is more environmental reactivity going on with all the stimuli in the neighborhood. People are out and about walking, bike riding, horseback riding, skateboarding, etc. My house backs up to a dry wash with a lovely pathway for everything! There is a steady stream of neighborhood noises from all the traffic in the dry wash. For those of us that have view fencing, this added outdoor traffic is even more of an issue for our dogs! Not only do they hear it but they see it as well. Dogs are also more reactive in the house because of all the added neighborhood traffic that they are able to see and hear from any window in the household. Add to that this nice weather allowing our main doors to be open with security or screen doors providing our dogs with even more sensory access to everything going on.

How are we supposed to work from home with so much reactivity? We are working through phone meetings and online meetings now more than ever. That isn't easy to do when the dog barks every time he hears or sees something or someone! Here are a few tips to help get you through this stressful time:

- When you are on the phone or in an online meeting, close yourself in a room WITHOUT your dog. Working from home can be very distracting. It is best to exclude your furry canine from this situation in order to allow for uninterrupted time to get this sort of work done.
- Consider re-instituting crate training or enclosing your dog in an inner room of the house with a baby gate or a closed door. This can be a bedroom with the window and window coverings closed or maybe a larger laundry room. Make the room nice and comfy with bedding, water, and toys to keep your 4-legged baby occupied some of the time during the day.
- Consider closing the dog door if your dog is outside barking at every little thing he hears or sees. Your dog does not need to be outside just because he has the

freedom or access to choose to be outdoors. People out in the neighborhood enjoying the outdoors are likely inundated with all the barking dogs.

- Ask a professional before you make a purchase of an anti-barking device such as a bark collar or an environmental bark deterrent. There needs to be some consideration for the pros, cons, risks, and side effects of these devices.

Don't let your dog practice this reactive behavior. Remember, practice makes perfect so the more they do it, the more they "will" do it even when things go back to normal. You can manage it by minimizing your dog's access to doors, windows, fences, gates, and outdoors in general some of the time. Divert the situation by giving your dog OTHER things to do such as food puzzles, and chew toys. You can also work on it with a properly advised behavior modification plan.

The next most common issue we are seeing is separation anxiety rearing its ugly head. The dogs are getting used to us being home so there is such a contrast for them when we are gone! We are spending an unprecedented amount of time with our dogs and for many of us, our dogs have become our emotional support. All that added time can cause our dogs to redefine normal which means there is a need or an expectation for us be home and interacting with them. We are seeing symptoms of separation anxiety such as barking, chewing, scratching, panting, pacing, and other general distress behaviors. These behaviors are coming out even during short trips to the grocery store!

If your dog is even slightly inclined to be more dependent, needy, attention seeking, or has experienced separation anxiety in the past please do some independence training with your dog. Independence training is where you separate yourself from your dog. Go for a walk WITHOUT your dog, do your office Zoom meetings with you isolated in your office without your dog, etc. You should also be sure you aren't giving your dog affection and attention all the time. Your dog needs to know that even when you are home, you are not always available to him. The more attention we give our dogs, the more we increase their expectation for attention. Simply mixing in some bits of independence training will go a long way toward our dogs understanding what to expect when things get back to normal.

We are seeing more random stressors with our dogs simply due to their lives now being filled with chaos, emotions, stress, and overstimulation! This is playing out in many different ways such as fighting between household dogs, over and under eating (sound familiar?), changes in their sleep/wake cycle with fewer relaxing naps, dogs becoming more short tempered, dogs with more aches and pains due to all the added exercise, anxiety from our chaos invading their normally peaceful lives. Dogs are probably our best emotional support system, but we must be careful to not set them up for disappointment and a rough adjustment when we get back to our hectic lives.

Lastly, what about the cats? We are seeing stress with our feline kids as well. Cats are notoriously more independent and life at home impacts their normally calm lives full of restful naps. Cats tend to be more stoic when there is stress in the house so sometimes it may be harder to link their behavior to the stress in the house. We are hearing of litter box problems, over and under grooming, over and under eating, more spats between the other cats in the house, retreating and hiding, seeking higher places in order to escape stress. Please be sure your cats have sufficient three-dimensional access with shelving and cat trees. They need a rotation of toys to keep their interest as well as interactive play time and grooming. Finally, consider “instinct” feeders for your cat so your cat has to “hunt” for her food instead of bellying up to the large bowl of food that is so convenient when bored or stressed!

If you feel your family and your pets are struggling with this new short-term normal, please reach out. We are now doing more Zoom or online consultations than ever! Now is the best time to strike a balance so the transition back to real life is as stress-free as possible.