

Dog Works! Monday Blog for 7/2/18: Noise Sensitivity

Well, I guess the brighter side of the fireworks cancellation for the 4th is that our dogs won't be getting scared and running off as happens unfortunately often on the 4th of July. However, it doesn't mean that we shouldn't be working on our dogs' noise sensitivity. The time to do this is now, and for the duration of their lives.

Sound sensitivity can pop up anytime in any dog. It is quite common for dogs to start noticing sudden noises, such as thunder, gunshots, fireworks, etc. as they age. Three years old is often the timeframe when they suddenly become startled by noise. You might think, well, my dog is pretty bombproof on noises because he/she has never reacted, but the fact is, without a little bit of conditioning, any dog can become noise sensitive over time. Without helping them learn that noises aren't scary, they will just get worse. Reactive breeds, such as the sheepherding breeds are notorious for their reactivity to noise. Why is this? Because they have been bred to have extremely sensitive hearing so they can hear their "shepherd" from long distances while working their flocks. They are also more reactive than other breeds because without being a quick, responsive herder, they might lose their sheep. Also, if you have a little puppy who already gets startled by noises, the time to fix this is NOW.

So, what can we do to help our friends, even if they do not appear to be startled by noise? The main thing to remember here, is that your dog values whatever YOU make valuable. So, in working on, or preventing, this problem, you must make the solution super FUN FUN FUN!

There are commercially available recordings you can buy with firecrackers, etc. that you can play very quietly at first, slowly increasing the volume over time so they become quite accustomed. This works well for a start, but eventually, they might become used to the particular recording and not associate it with outside noises. Great start, though, especially with puppies.

Next thing I like to do is make sudden noises at meal times, like banging the metal dishes together, with happy squealing (on my part)-all very positive-"Dinner!!" And so they think this is all fun and good and dinner comes along with the party. Again, always start with quiet banging, building the noise level up over time. Another favorite of mine is making use of that horrible bubble wrap. Begin with one little pop-followed immediately by toys, playing, treats, wildly excited owner-whatever makes your dog's happy world turn on-whole doggy party thing. Gradually increase number and loudness of bubble wrap cracks over time until your dog goes nuts with joy for the noise. Again-if you make it fun-your dog will love it. Bubble wrap is extra great because it sounds like fireworks and guns. If your dog is freaked by the very first pop-make it quieter and increase the reward.

This kind of doggy party accompanied by loud classical/instrumental music during actual thunderstorms also helps re-direct your dog towards a positive, active, mind engagement during the most notoriously scary event for our canine friends!

In summary-making noises fun is what will help your dog. A soothing voice when they are already scared makes things worse. And keeping it up will help your dog throughout the course of his/her life.