The Misha May Foundation

*mutts in safe homes always*

PO Box 151166 Lakewood, CO 80215-1166

303-239-0382

[www.mishamayfoundation.org](http://www.mishamayfoundation.org) [mishamayfoundation@gmail.com](mailto:mishamayfoundation@gmail.com)

a 501(c)(3) non-profit dog (and cat) rescue

Learn about, with, and for, the animals.

Sensory Management of Canine Anxieties

© Mary Hall, The Misha May Foundation [www.mishamayfoundation.org](http://www.mishamayfoundation.org) 303-239-0382

According to free dictionary.com: **Anxiety (**This definition holds true for canines as well.)

**a.** A state of uneasiness and apprehension, as about future uncertainties.

**b.** A cause of anxiety: *For some people, air travel is a real anxiety.*

**2.** *Psychiatry* A state of apprehension, uncertainty, and fear resulting from the anticipation of a realistic or fantasized threatening event or situation, often impairing physical and psychological function

**3.** Eager, often agitated desire

Training Look at That! https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fU1gAI42MH4

*Overt signs of canine anxiety:* crouched, cowering posture; tail lowered or between legs, ears back or down toward side, pacing, quivering or shaking, distressed vocalization, loss of bowel and/or bladder control, obsessive sniffing, escape/hiding behaviors.

*Subtle signs of canine anxiety:* panting, lip licking, looking away, dilated pupils, sweaty paws, loss of appetite, increased drooling, excessive yawning, excessive vigilance, unusually slow or fast movement.

*Common canine anxieties:* thunderstorms, fireworks, gun shots, vacuum cleaners, household & urban noises, new or novel items/experiences, unfamiliar people and unfamiliar animals, isolation/separation/abandonment.

Although the use of counter conditioning and desensitization training techniques (with or without the use of homeopathic or allopathic medicines) provide the optimum long term results, other modalities are useful during both the acute phase of anxiety management as well as ongoing management during training or anxiety specific events.

*Using the sense of smell:* DAP (Dog Appeasing Pheromone) products: collars, sprays, plug in room diffusers. Collars & sprays offer portability. Diffusers are more economically practical in a multi dog household. Some brands are odorless to humans, others are scented. Both the collars and room diffusers last about a month, the sprays last 4 – 6 hours and can be applied to bedding, car interiors and doggy bandanas. The spray is never to be applied directly to the dog. DAP is released by a nursing bitch and has been shown to have calming effect on dogs in various life stages.

The scents from the essential oils of lavender, eucalyptus & peppermint have been reported to have a calming effect on dogs. Caution is advised with direct application as some plants (such as eucalyptus) are toxic if ingested by dogs.

*Using the sense of taste:* There’s a wide variety of calming treats available on the market. Common ingredients include herbs such as valerian, chamomile, skullcap, lemon balm, and lavender, as well as clover and oats. In addition to the calming effects, some herbal preparations may act as a nutritional tonic if prepared specifically for your pet by a professional herbalist. Some nutritional supplements are also known to have calming properties for dogs and are often found in calming edibles for dogs. For example L thiamine is a free amino acid (found in green tea) that stimulates alpha brain wave production resulting in relaxation. Thiamine is a water soluble B vitamin that is important in stress reduction. It is not stored in the dog’s body and is used at a higher rate during times of stress. Decapeptide is isolated from the milk protein casein and colostrum is found in the ‘first’ milk produced by a female. Both are known for their ability to calm anxious pooches.

Bach Flower Essences help gently restore balance to you furry friend’s emotional state. Flower essences may be used in their water, on treats or in food. It can also be applied to their paws. Rescue Remedy is well known to rescuer’s and shelter workers for its ability to help calm a fearful Fido. They are safe and effective and no known side effects.

*Using the sense of vision:* In milder cases of anxiety, it may be possible to visually distract your dog. For example, a slowly rolling ball or gently shaken toy may be enough to enable you to redirect your dog toward something or someone enjoyable and away from their source of angst. Some dogs are over stimulated and frightened by expansive views. If that is the case, limiting their visual fields out of windows and doors by closing window coverings or covering their crate is useful. In addition to crate covers available in numerous colors and fabrics, curtains, towels or table cloths can provide adequate coverage for a crate. Covering the crate during electrical storms may ease tension produced from the flashes of light.

A relatively new product developed by the dog trainer Trish King called the Calming Cap has been proving to be a useful tool in the anti anxiety arsenal. It was originally developed for a dog that was terrified of car rides; successes for dogs that fear lightening and walking on the leash have been reported. There’s a mesh or sheer overlay that slightly blurs or dims the dog’s vision while wearing the cap. It does not impair the dog’s ability to navigate her environment or even play ball while wearing the cap. Most likely, the Calming Cap will require some training and positive associations to be created before being put into use.

*Using the sense of sound:* In general, dogs find simple, low pitched sounds relaxing. The Through a Dog’s Ear CD series is scientifically designed and tested music that calms canines. The series was developed by Joshua Leeds, a psychoacoustic specialist and Lisa Spector, a concert pianist and dog lover in order to help alleviate anxiety. It is used with success in homes, clinics, doggy daycares and shelters. (A noise phobia series is now offered in conjunction with Victoria Stillwell. This program combines music, counter conditioning and desensitization to treat common canine noise phobias such as fireworks, thunderstorms and urban sounds.)

Radios, TV’s, fans and fountains can also be used to provide a constant sound that may aid in drowning out or decreasing the severity of frightening outdoor sounds.

*Using the sense of touch:* Wrapping or swaddling techniques have been used to calm anxious dogs. Special classes are offered in these techniques. More recently, the Thunder Shirt has been introduced for use by the general dog loving public. The constant, firm pressure provided by the securely fit garment provides the fearful dog with a sense of security and allows them to relax.

In addition to canine massage therapy, there are several other touch related modalities that can be used to ease the companion canine’s angst. Telling T Touch, EFT (Emotional Freedom Techniques) or EMDR/tapping can provide either relief or at least the opportunity to redirect after the tactile sensation distracts the dog from the subject of their anxiety. Acupuncture by a professional has proven to be a valuable tool for many owners of anxious dogs.

*Using the sixth sense:* Intuitive healers, Reiki therapy, crystal therapy and other forms of energy work can often be part of the successful management of canine anxiety.