

B-8 TIER 2: PROTOCOL FOR DESENSITIZATION AND COUNTERCONDITIONING TO NOISES AND ACTIVITIES THAT OCCUR BY THE DOOR

Some dogs that cannot be left alone become anxious whenever any activity occurs by doors. Some dogs that are fearfully aggressive or those that are protectively or territorially aggressive react whenever anyone comes to a door and rings the doorbell or knocks. Because the reaction level at the door is a key in the dog's increasing anxieties, clients often need to work separately on desensitizing and counterconditioning the dogs to noises and activities around the door. This protocol is designed to help you teach your dog to relax and to be calm in such circumstances. As with the other protocols, it is expected that you have completed "Protocol for Deference: Basic Program" and "Protocol for Relaxation: Behavior Modification Tier 1." You may use this program to help with the last part of Tier 1.

Place the dog in the middle of the room (see suggested layout drawing) with its side facing the door. This allows the dog to use peripheral vision but will not draw all attention to the door. It is best to have two people to practice this protocol: one person acts as the rewarder, and one person acts as the stranger. It is best at first if the stranger is a person with whom the dog is comfortable.

The goal of the protocol is to get the dog to relax when given a cue to do so, despite the fact that someone is at the door. Some people prefer that the dog be permitted to bark once or twice as a warning before being quiet. This may be possible, but for some dogs, even reacting to that limited extent may send them into a cascade of behavior that is undesirable and inappropriate. It is not sufficient that the dog is sitting or lying quietly—it must not be showing any of the physical signs of underlying physiological stress (shaking, trembling, panting, salivating, increased heart rate, averted gaze, frequent eye movements, and so on). Relaxed animals can learn, and animals that enjoy the tasks learn faster.

When the dog is sitting or lying down and is relaxed, give instructions to the stranger to begin to knock softly and briefly (see the following task list). You should review the plan with the stranger before you practice with the dog so that you two can communicate without confusion. This helps prevent anxiety in the dog. As soon as you hear or anticipate that you will hear the knock, call the dog to look at you. As soon as it looks at you, say, "Good boy (girl)!" and reward with a treat. If the dog glances quickly at the door but otherwise does not appear to be upset and either sponta-

neously returns its gaze to you or responds to a soft signal from you (pursing of your lips, clearing your throat, saying the dog's name, and so on), you can reward the dog. If the dog reacts or stares at the door, call the dog to you; farther away from the door, repeat, with the stranger knocking more softly. If this does not work and the dog continues to react, take the dog out of the room, practice some tasks from Tier 1 when the dog is calm enough to successfully do so, and start again at a softer level of knock with more distance between the dog and the door.

A Gentle Leader/Promise System Canine Head Collar can help correct the dog at the point in the behavioral sequence of reacting to the door when the dog is best able to learn from the experience (when it first starts). You can also prevent the full-blown inappropriate behavior and help the dog relax while using a head collar.

Finally, if you must remove the dog from the room, you will be best served by being able to do so with a verbal command. If your dog will not respond to a verbal command to come when it is upset, you will need a head collar to kindly and gently lead the dog toward a more appropriate behavior. If you have any doubts that you can easily correct the dog with a verbal command, or if you or the stranger are concerned about personal safety, please use a head collar. If you work with the dog, it will learn to couple the verbal command with the collar direction, and you will gradually be able to work off-leash. If this never happens, it is not a disaster. Provided you are with the dog, you can use a head collar and a long-distance lead to correct inappropriate door behavior. Do not leave leads or head collars on an unsupervised dog; the dog could injure itself.

If you do not have someone to help you practice the tasks, you can still participate in this protocol. Make a tape recording of the tasks as listed with appropriate pauses between them, and start with the volume very low. As your dog's behavior improves, increase the volume. This also works well for dogs that react more to the people on the other side of the door than they do to the sounds.

The following tasks will help you teach your dog to react more appropriately at the door. Remember that you can use a baby gate to keep the dog in a room away from the door so that you do not get into a contest of wills at an entryway. If the dog is less upset under gated circumstances, you can progress more quickly with the program because the dog will not continue to learn from and reinforce its inappropriate behavior.

Dog's Task

Dog sits and relaxes while:
 Person knocks briefly and softly
 Person knocks softly for 5 seconds
 Person knocks softly for 10 seconds
 Person knocks moderately and briefly
 Person knocks moderately for 5 seconds
 Person knocks moderately for 10 seconds
 Person knocks normally, briefly
 Person knocks normally for 5 seconds
 Person knocks normally for 10 seconds
 Person knocks loudly for 5 seconds
 Person knocks loudly for 10 seconds
 Person bangs on the door briefly
 Person bangs on the door for 5 seconds
 Person bangs on the door for 10 seconds

Comments about response or difficulty

Person rings the doorbell briefly
 Person rings the doorbell for a normal length of time
 Person rings the doorbell for 5 seconds
 Person knocks on the door normally and turns the knob
 Person opens the door 2 centimeters
 Person opens the door 5 centimeters
 Person opens the door 10 centimeters
 Person opens the door, steps into the doorway, and then closes the door
 (do not enter)
 Person opens the door, steps through the doorway into the room, then
 exits
 Person opens the door, enters the room, and closes the door behind him
 or her

Once the dog can sit and stay while a familiar person can come to and through the doorway, repeat the task list with someone who is less familiar to the dog.

For Future Repetitions

- Repeat all tasks in different locations.
- Repeat all tasks with all family members.
- Repeat all tasks with only every second or third task being rewarded with a treat. (Remember praise!)
- Repeat with only intermittent treat reinforcement. (Remember praise!)

Antianxiety medications may help some dogs that otherwise are unable to succeed in this program. Remember, if it is decided that medication could benefit your dog, you need to use it *in addition* to the behavior modification, not instead of it.