

TIER 2: PROTOCOL FOR DESENSITIZATION AND COUNTER-CONDITIONING TO NOISES AND ACTIVITIES THAT OCCUR BY THE DOOR

Some dogs who cannot be left alone become anxious whenever any activity occurs by doors. Some dogs who are fearfully aggressive, or who are protectively or territorially aggressive, react whenever anyone comes to a door and rings the bell or knocks.

Because the reaction level at the door is a key component for the dog's increasing anxieties, you may need to work separately on desensitizing and counter-conditioning the dogs to noises and activities around the door. This protocol is designed to help you teach your dog to not react and, instead, to relax and be calm in such circumstances. As with the other protocols, it is expected that you have completed **Protocol for Deference** and **Protocol for Relaxation: Behavior Modification Tier 1**. You may benefit from using this protocol to help with the last part of **Tier 1**.

When working with this protocol you can place your dog in the middle of the room with his side facing the door. This will allow him to use peripheral vision, but will not direct him to focus all of his attention on the door. It is best to have two people to practice this protocol: one person acts as the "rewarder," and one acts as the "stranger." At the first pass, it is best if the stranger is a person with whom the dog is comfortable.

Remember that the point of this protocol is to teach the dog to relax, when given a cue to do so, despite someone being at the door. Some people prefer that the dog be permitted to give one or two barks as a warning before they are quiet. This may be possible, but it will depend on the dog. For some dogs, barking even twice can send them into a cascade of behavior that is undesirable and inappropriate.

Please remember, as with the Tier 1 behavior modification program, *it is not sufficient that your dog is sitting or lying quietly—he must not be showing any of the physical signs of underlying physiological stress (shaking, trembling, panting, salivating, increased heart rate, averted gaze and frequent eye movements, et cetera)*. Relaxed animals can learn more easily and animals who enjoy the tasks learn faster. Experiencing true distress-reinforced fearful and associated reactive behaviors actively blocks the learning of the new behaviors you wish your dog to substitute for these.

When your dog is sitting or lying down and relaxed, give instructions to the stranger to begin to knock softly and briefly (see Task List below). You will want to review the plan with the stranger *before* you practice with the dog, so that you and the stranger can communicate without confusion. This will help prevent anxiety in your dog. You may find that the use of cell phones with ear pieces can help, but you will have to resist the tendency to talk more than minimally, because this will distract the dog, and your stranger will also have to keep talk to a minimum so that she is not a distraction for you.

As soon as you hear or anticipate that you will hear the knock, ask your dog to look at you. As soon as he looks at you, say "Good boy!" and reward him with a treat. If your dog glances quickly at the door, but otherwise does not appear to be upset, and either spontaneously returns his gaze to you, or responds immediately to a soft reminder signal from you (clicking your tongue, clearing your throat, softly saying your dog's name), reward your dog immediately.

If, instead, your dog reacts or stares at the door, call him to you, and move further away from the door so that he is not so close to the sound of the knocking. Then repeat the exercise by having the stranger knock more softly. If these changes do not help and your dog continues to react, remove him from the room, practice some tasks from **Tier 1** when the dog is calm enough to successfully do so, and start over at a softer level of knock, with even more distance between the dog and the door.

A head collar or no-pull harness may help if your dog is quickly reactive. If you can use a head collar you can hold the lead taut but not tight and as soon as your dog begins to bark, you can gently guide his head away from the door. This action may interrupt his behavioral sequence sufficiently for him to not experience the full arousal cascade. Dogs who cannot wear head collars can be turned by and get a tactile signal from a well-fitted harness. If you have worked to teach your dog that his response to the shift in the harness should be to look at you, a harness can work as well as a head collar. By gently turning your dog's head toward you and then immediately rewarding the dog for looking at you, you encourage your dog to look to you for cues about the expected behavior while also encouraging him to ignore the door.

Finally, if you have to remove your dog from the room, it's best if you can do so using a verbal request. Grabbing and dragging the dog from the door will teach the dog to avoid you. If your dog will not respond to a verbal request to come once he is upset, you will need a head collar to kindly and gently lead the dog toward a more appropriate behavior. If he is still upset and pulls on the head collar, you are not ready for this tier of the behavior modification. Go back and work on Tier 1 or break the earliest steps of this protocol that he could do into smaller segments.

It is best to work with a stranger who is not afraid of your dog. If you think that your dog's reaction will scare someone, or if your dog reacts particularly fiercely to certain people, please consider using a head collar when working with these exercises. In a worst-case scenario, a head collar will keep everyone safe. If your stranger is calm and not worried, your dog will be less aroused. If you are not worried, your dog will be less aroused.

For very reactive dogs, you may have to gradually work toward having the dog not react at the door while off-lead and without a head collar or harness. If this never happens, it is not a disaster. As long as you are with your dog you can use a head collar and a long distance lead to help your dog be less reactive at the door. Please do not leave a lead or head collar on a dog if you are not supervising the dog. He could injure himself or become entrapped and die.

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

The following tasks will help you to teach your dog to react more appropriately when at the door. Please also

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 your dog is less distressed under gated circumstances, you will be able to progress more quickly with the program, as the dog will not continue to learn from and reinforce his inappropriate behavior.

Finally, anti-anxiety medications may help some dogs who otherwise are not able to succeed in this program. Please remember that if it's decided that medication could benefit your dog, you need to use it **in addition** to the behavior modification, not instead of it.

Task Sheet Instructions

These tasks are meant to give you guidance, only. They are designed to use very, very, very gradual changes. Such tiny steps allow you to reward aspects of the behaviors that are good, without accidentally rewarding aspects of behavior that are not so good.

Built into these programs are the concepts of desensitization (DS), where you teach the dog not to react to some situation by exposing him to the situation at a level below that needed to have him react and become distressed, and counter-conditioning (CC), where you reward behaviors that are in direct opposition or contrast to those that are undesirable.

If you open any applied psychology text or article on learning, you will see similar programs. There is nothing magic or novel or original here; these tasks are those that are common to most dog and cat training and behavior modification programs, and you will see similar task sheets in a number of books, articles, and online sources.

Please remember that what *is different here* is that you are rewarding the physical signs that the dog is less distressed or worried. You are rewarding *only* relaxed behaviors (review the **Protocol for Teaching Your Dog to Take a Deep Breath and Use Other Biofeedback Methods as Part of Relaxation**).

The tasks involve only common situations in which your dog may respond inappropriately or undesirably. Some of these situations may not be relevant to you, and others that are relevant may be missing. Please feel free to customize or alter this program, but please do so using the pattern of approach used here (e.g., gradually work up to the task, frequent returns to something easier, always ending on a good note, et cetera).

The task is listed on the left. There is space for you to make comments about how easy or hard the task was for the dog, how many times it had to be repeated, or other

questionable behaviors that appeared during the task. You should discuss these with your veterinarian at your re-exam appointment.

Try grouping these tasks in groups that you work through in segments that last no more than 15 minutes.

Dog's Task

The dog sits, stays, and relaxes when:

- Stranger knocks briefly and softly
- Stranger knocks softly for 5 seconds
- Stranger knocks softly for 10 seconds
- Stranger knocks moderately and briefly
- Stranger knocks moderately for 5 seconds
- Stranger knocks moderately for 10 seconds
- Stranger knocks normally, briefly
- Stranger knocks normally for 5 seconds
- Stranger knocks normally for 10 seconds
- Stranger knocks loudly for 5 seconds
- Stranger knocks loudly for 10 seconds
- Stranger bangs on door briefly
- Stranger bangs on door for 5 seconds
- Stranger bangs on door for 10 seconds
- Stranger rings bell briefly
- Stranger rings bell for a normal length of time
- Stranger rings bell for 5 seconds
- Stranger knocks on door normally and turns knob
- Stranger opens door 2 cm
- Stranger opens door 5 cm
- Stranger opens door 10 cm
- Stranger opens door, steps into doorway, and then closes door (does not enter)
- Stranger opens door, steps through doorway into room, then exits
- Stranger opens door, enters room, closes door behind him

Once your dog can sit and stay while a family member or someone known to them can come to and through the door, 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 being rewarded with a treat. (Remember praise!)
- Repeat with only intermittent treat reinforcement. (Remember praise!)