

## Visitors and Pet Stress

So you're expecting a house full of company? You have grandchildren of all ages visiting? Tons of people disrupting the usual routine? Holiday stress? Sure, and stress for your pets as well. Here's what you can expect from your pets, and what you can do to help!

Protect your pets from themselves and visitors. Look for Signs of Stress:

### **Dog Signs of Anxiety:**

- a. Tail dropped or tucked
- b. Drooling
- c. Yawning
- d. Lip licking
- e. Trembling
- f. Increased startle responses to sudden movements from people or to noises
- g. Cringing
- h. Sudden barking and lunging at visitors
- i. Hyper-excitement (racing around, bouncing and yipping, pinch nipping at hands or clothing)

### **How to help your dog cope with stress**

Dogs generally function best when kept to a regular routine. They also try to “do their job.” This means that your dog may become anxious when the usual daily routine is disrupted and/or there are too many people to watch and ‘alert you” to. Dogs often expect that part of their job is to let you know when visitors enter the property or house. If you have many visitors, your dog may feel stress in trying to let you know. Couple this with changes in routine (late nights, early or later-than-usual mornings, extra noise and stimulation) and you have a dog who feels worn out, confused, and exhausted.

Help your dog by trying to maintain your usual routine as much as possible: Maintain regular feeding, walks, and exercise times. Pay attention to the above behaviors in your dog. Give your dog quiet time when visitors are present and he or she shows signs of being overwhelmed (see list above). Set aside a comfortable room, or even access to your fenced yard. Encourage your dog to use these places for a break from the crowd. Give the dog long-term chewing toys while he or she is having quiet time. Excuse yourself from company (or set a “doggy-sitting” family schedule, so that someone can keep your dog quiet company,) if it doesn't like to be alone. Quiet time isn't meant to be a punishment—it's meant to give your dog time to relax, be comfortable, and de-stress from over-stimulation. Do this as often as your dog shows anxiety signs.

This may not be the most convenient for you, but it will help your dog cope.

### **Cat Signs of Anxiety**

- a. Tail twitching or slapping
- b. Raised or puffed fur

- c. Accepts petting and then bites/or scratches
- d. Hissing
- e. Hiding in plain sight with eyes closed and tail wrapped around feet
- f. Hiding under furniture
- g. Fleeing
- h. Sudden charging attacks with biting and/or scratching

### **How to help your cat cope with stress**

Cats are very individual in how they respond to visitors. Some cats routinely hide under the bed. Others are very outgoing and friendly. However, even the most people-loving cat can be overwhelmed with too many people, too much noise, and too much stimulation. Similarly to dogs, cats need time and places to “chill out.” Give your cat access to a “comfort room”. One way to do so is to put up a baby gate in a bedroom doorway (preferable the bedroom your cat likes to be in) with the bottom 8” above the ground. This will keep adults and children out and let the cat self-regulate when it needs quiet time. Be sure to include a litter box and water dish.

Practice several days in advance of your company with encouraging the cat to go into the room under the baby gate. You can do this by playing in the room with your cat, offering treats, placing food bowls for routine feeding in that room. Don’t try to force your cat under the gate—use positive interactions and food treats (pieces of chicken, et cet.) to encourage your cat.

Don’t worry if your cat hides when people are present. Also, discourage people from trying to interact with your cat or from forcing their attention on your cat. If the cat approaches a person, fine, but it should be the cat’s idea. Also, protect your cat from small children who can pull tails or poke eyes because the child doesn’t know better.

Watch for anxiety signs (see above list). If you see them, calmly remove your cat from the company and put it in the “comfort room” you’ve set up. Toss some treats and gently close the door. If the cat meows or scratches to get out, you can open the door and let it out again, but continue to keep an eye on its reactions.

### **All the Usual Veterinary Holiday Concerns**

As veterinarians will tell you, there are a number of holiday hazards for dogs and cats. These include chocolate, tinsel, poinsettia plants, and other toxic or gastric risk items. Contact your veterinarian or look at the ASPCA website for more information.