Safe Haven

A safe haven is an important place for your dog to have within the home. This can be a place to help fearful dogs feel more comfortable, give reactive dogs a temporary place to be removed from triggers, or just a place that your dog can go to during the day when they feel like being alone.

Creating a Safe Haven

Create an area for your dog to go to that enables them to be able to remove themselves and be alone. The area should be somewhere that is quiet and more removed from the rest of the home and should be a very comfortable place such as a bed, pillow, crate (if they like their crate), etc. You can feed their meals in this space and give toys that they get to play with exclusively when they are in their safe haven. When introducing them to the new safe haven space, give them lots of treats and feed them incrementally to help build a positive association with the space.

For Fearful Dogs

Many fearful dogs will benefit from having a safe haven that gives them space to remove themselves if/when they feel overwhelmed. This could be during a thunderstorm, when there are new and unfamiliar people over, if there's a lot of activity in the home, or any time that the dog is feeling stressed. Make this space comfortable and acclimate your dog using the steps above. Once they have acclimated to this space, keep access to it open for them at all times, and you may find that they will start going to it on their own when they need it.

For Reactive Dogs

Creating a safe haven can also be a key part of a reactive dog's management within the home. If your dog is reactive to certain stimuli, it can sometimes be impossible or impractical to avoid their triggers, including novel people coming to the home, children, people at the door, etc. If/When these triggers occur, lead your dog to their safe haven; ideally, you can do this before they begin reacting, such as setting your dog up in their safe haven before your guests come over. Once there, give them either their meal or treats through a puzzle toy, or give them a long lasting chew or toys that they will play with by themselves. They should be able to keep themselves entertained and busy the entire time they're in the safe haven, unless they fall asleep.

Space Guarding

If your dog guards space on the couch, chairs, bed, or other furniture, then creating a safe haven in the same room near you may be beneficial. If/When your dog climbs up on the furniture, lure them off and then to the safe haven with high-value treats. In this instance, you don't need to worry about the area being quiet and removed, but it should still be very comfortable and enticing, as your dog should want to and enjoy going there, providing them a better alternative than jumping on the furniture. This area should also only be for your dog and them alone.

Resource Guarding

If your dog guards resources such as food, treats, or toys, then creating a safe haven for them to eat or relax with their favorite toy may be a good part of their management, especially when visitors come over. You can feed them and give them chews, toys, or anything else they may guard in their safe haven to avoid either yourself or anyone else accidently coming between your dog and their resource.

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