

I need some help with my dog. He is not aggressive at home or at the dog park, but when we take him to the veterinarian's office he goes crazy. He knows where we are when we pull into their parking lot. He starts panting and becomes very agitated. Once I get him into the waiting room he starts barking and trying to attack the other dogs and the staff members. I have had to change vets due to his behavior but it doesn't seem to make a difference. Is there anything I can do besides having him muzzled and sedated for his exam and treatments?

First you should realize that his aggression is most likely his attempt to deal with excessive fear. He is associating the smells, noises, and sights of the hospital with prior visits that he found unpleasant. Perhaps he remembers pain from a vaccination or nail trimming. Some fearful dogs react by being timid and tense, but in your dog's case, he reacts with aggression.

It won't be easy to change his mind set at this point in his life, but you can try. Ask your veterinarian for a prescription of anti-anxiety medication to give before his visits or at least have him wear a dog appeasing pheromone collar. Try taking him to the office with the anti-anxiety treatment on board when he doesn't have an appointment. Drive to the parking lot and go back home, then just to the waiting room and go home, then into an exam room but nothing done to him, etc. Verbal praise and treats should be flowing when he is calm. Gradually have each trip get closer to what happens at an actual visit. When it comes time for an appointment, suggest that the staff do his exam and treatments on the floor if he has reacted when on the exam table, or on the table if he reacts more on the floor. Try to determine if he is calmer with you present or without you. Bring some of his favorite treats to offer as distraction and positive reinforcement for being tolerant.

Pups who have participated in puppy kindergarten classes at their vet's office are generally more at ease during later visits as they have developed good feelings about the office during their formative socialization period, but with your patience and persistence there is still hope for your dog.

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