

Pet Talk Tuesdays – 9/10/2020

Nick Rusch:

Time for pet talk. Joining us via the telephone it is our friend Dr. Marty Greer from Veterinary Village in Lomira. Doctor, good morning. How are you doing?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah.

Nick Rusch:

Nice to have you with us once again and we know that everybody's still kind of getting through the COVID here as best we can. It's a different situation for everybody. And some of the creatures that are affected during this, not only the humans, but also our pets, right?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Right. Right. There's been changes for our pets.

Nick Rusch:

So we need to be kind of a conscious of what's going on with them and how can we help them kind of adjust it and go through it?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Sure. And they've all been accustomed to us being home for the summer, from work, from school, and now everybody's changing their schedule, even though things aren't going back to completely normal, there's still changes in the schedule for most every family, particularly if they have children that are school age. So the important thing is that we help them transition back and ideally we could have started this a couple of weeks ago when we knew what was going to happen, but I mean, did we even know two weeks ago how this week would work?

So it makes it really difficult. So the important thing is that we start helping them learn to be alone for short periods of time and then longer periods of time so that when we return to our jobs, to our schools, classrooms, to whatever setting we're going back to, that they can make that adjustment and do it comfortably and safely. A lot of pets end up with separation anxiety. I don't want to leave cats out of this because even cats who seem fairly independent and sort of aloof, can have these symptoms as well. So it's difficult for them to understand the change in the schedule.

Nick Rusch:

What should we watch for and I know as you said, some people think that cats are extremely independent and many ways they are, but nonetheless they're used to that human contact and they're used to your being there now. What should we be watching for in the animal's behavior?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Sure. Well separation anxiety. The symptoms are going to be things like, "Well, she didn't eat or drink while I was gone. So she knew I wasn't going to be able to let her out to go potty." And I don't really think that dogs and cats are able to look forward to that and say, "Gee. I shouldn't drink too much because I won't be able to get out until four o'clock." I don't think that's in their repertoire of abilities to predict the future. I think they have a lot of abilities, but I don't think that's one of them. So the important thing is that you start to pick up on their cues when it's still early enough that we can address them. So if they stop eating or drinking when you're gone and they have a full bowl of water and a full bowl of food when you walk in the door and they suddenly dive into it and start eating and drinking, that's separation anxiety.

If they start to chew up things in the house, that can be a behavioral issue from the perspective of, "Your behavior was bad. You didn't keep the house cleaned up." Two, their behavior bad because they're just not well trained or most commonly that's separation anxiety again, because they're nervous, they're upset, they don't know what else to do,

they've got this nervous energy, they pace around the house, and they find the things that smell most like you. So that's socks and underwear, that's remote controls on the TV, that may be other smelly things like dish towels. So we have to be really careful because if they start chewing those up, not only is that destructive for your home, it's expensive to replace a cell phone or a remote on the TV, but it can also cause medical problems. So if they ingest something that's too small for them to pass and they end up going to surgery, that can be thousands of dollars of surgical intervention and sometimes they don't make it through.

So it's really important that we keep the garbage put away and we keep our cell phones put away and the remote control isn't where they can get it and the underwear and socks are put well away into the laundry bins where they can't get into them, make sure backpacks, if kids or family members have backpacks and purses that they might drop on the floor when they walk in the door that they get those picked up and put away. So it's just really important that we walk through the house before we leave them alone in the morning, do a pass through the house, clean up the place, and put them someplace that they can be safe while you're gone.

Nick Rusch:

You said something during that segment, that really peaked my interest and I guess it makes incredible sense, but people might not think of this. They go for the things that smell most like you.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah.

Nick Rusch:

And I guess that makes all sorts of sense if you stop and think about it for a minute, but maybe pet owners or some pet owners, haven't really thought of it in that light.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Right. And I think it's really true. If you've had your hands on your cell phone, your remote control, your sweaty feet, your sweaty gloves, any of those things, those are the things that they are looking for. They are looking for a way to connect with you when you're gone and you smell like the remote or the remote smells like you and they start seeking out that device because it's comfortable. Now, there are some new things on the market that have been out about two or three years. There's a device called a FRUBO camera. It's F-R-U-B-O. And it allows you to not only watch remotely what your pet is doing.

So if you're at your desk at work and you have a break and your boss doesn't mind that you're on your computer, you can go on your computer, look at your pet, see what they're doing, and then you can also talk to them and dispense treats to them through the FRUBO camera. So if you're looking for a way to interact with them, that's great. If you can do it without interrupting your workday. The important thing is if you see them doing something and you need to intervene, that you have some way to intervene without just putting your head down on your desk and whimpering because they're chewing up your new couch before you can get there.

There's even been reports with the FRUBO camera of burglars being caught in the home. That a dog be at home by themselves, the owner turns on the camera, they see somebody in their house that isn't supposed to be there. So they're kind of cool devices in a lot of ways. So it's something for people to look into if they're looking for a way to monitor their pet while they're gone.

Nick Rusch:

Before this innovation and we get a lot of show preparatory material here that we go through and I've run into this statistic many times, many times that people will phone their home and leave a message on the machine for the dog. And I'm sure you've heard of this too.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Right.

Nick Rusch:

I would like you to weigh in and tell me if that's helpful or if that's counterproductive because the dog can't really interact with you, but it hears yourself. So what do you think? Is that a positive or is that a potential negative?

Dr. Marty Greer:

I think it's a potential negative. I think the dog is then going to be more frantically looking for you because you're this faceless, bodiless voice that they recognize. I think it's going to be upsetting to them. So I think you're better off to try and use other ways to keep your pet comfortable. And that's going to be things like getting them accustomed to sleeping in a crate when you're gone or setting up a small room, a bathroom, a laundry room someplace that's relatively safe. They can't chew on a cord, they can't do any damage, they can't get to backpacks, they can't get to clothes, they can't ingest things. And so that they can very safely be in that environment while you're gone and it does take some practice. You can't just say, "Okay, we've had you out of your kennel in your entire life."

"We got you when you were two months old. We've been home for six months. You're eight months old now. We're going to stick you in a crate and we're going to go to work today." That's really tough on them. So it's important that we do some transition with them. There can be medications that we can use to help them learn. And please talk to your veterinarian about this. Don't use your medications and don't count on CBD oil. We don't know what CBD oil really is or does. Yes, it's natural, but grapes are natural and they're toxic to dogs and lilies are natural and they're toxic to cats. So we can't just say, "Well, let's use CBD oil." Let's go to our veterinarian, get a good, reliable pharmaceutical agent that's purified and approved by FDA so we know what it is. We know what the safety margins are.

We give that to our pet to help them learn if they need help. If they don't need help, just gradually transition them to be accustomed to being in the laundry room or the crate or in an ex pen in your living room someplace that they're safe. Don't hang your jeans over the crate while they're drying because they'll pull them through and chew them up. Look really carefully. You need to kind of get down on your hands and knees and crawl around like you would when you have a toddler and puppy proof the house so that they don't pick up thumb tacks and rubber bands and paperclips and coins and things that you might've dropped and didn't think were terribly important. So puppy proof, get them used to being in a crater or a laundry room, and if you need help contact your veterinarian because we have lots of really good pharmaceutical agents, not to bomb them out of their minds, but to help them learn to transition to being alone for those hours that you're going to be at work.

Nick Rusch:

Right.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Or school.

Nick Rusch:

That is a great idea, too, that you have to get down to their eye view, their level because otherwise you don't think about it.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Right.

Nick Rusch:

It's kind of akin to if you have a certain size dog, you don't put a lot of knickknacks on the table at tail height, right? It's just common sense.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Exactly. Exactly.

For those of us old enough to remember the Felix and Oscar, the odd couple show.

Nick Rusch:

Yeah.

Dr. Marty Greer:

You need to have your house or your apartment look like Felix's, not like Oscars because if it looks like Oscars, they're going to get into everything.

Nick Rusch:

Right. Right. Now we were talking about when you're gone, I know that sometimes pet owners think it's a good idea to put on the television or the radio when they're gone to help keep the dog company. Is, is that helpful or is that more of a hindrance as well?

Dr. Marty Greer:

No, I think that is helpful. And they even have dog television stations and dogs CDs so that they are soothing kinds of music you can have in the background so that they can't hear some of the noise in the neighborhood. I think that's really useful. There's also devices that can be noisemakers that help them get used to things like thunderstorms and so forth. So I definitely think there's some validity to those kinds of techniques. So I would encourage those. But again, you want to start doing this. Like work over this weekend to do some of these things.

Don't just expect your dog to magically be comfortable with all these new changes that you're throwing at them because they might not like the radio station you picked. They might want your radio station instead of the one that you selected for them. So think about what your pet's preferences are and have it at a comfortable volume. Your dog can hear better than you can.

Nick Rusch:

Right.

Dr. Marty Greer:

So don't turn it up so loudly that you're causing them to be uncomfortable because of the sound in the background.

Nick Rusch:

That's the other thing. Their hearing, dogs and cats is certainly much sharper than ours. So volume level is important and they don't like sharp noises.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Right.

Nick Rusch:

Yeah. It's an interesting thing because ... and you mentioned too on the weekend, I think that's a great idea because while you're testing out some of these possibilities, while you're there, you can then observe them a little bit too and then-

Dr. Marty Greer:

Right.

Nick Rusch:

Probably do a better job of determining what works for them and you, and what is not going to work.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Right. And you can do it for short stretches. You can run to the grocery store and instead of running all your errands, go to the grocery store, run home, see how things are going. So they're home for 15, 20, 30 minutes at a time, not for four hours. You don't want to push them so fast and so far that they make mistakes. We want to make them successful. And to do that, we've got to help them.

So you can't reason with them. They're not any different than a two year old. You can't explain some of these things so you have to really be logical about how you work through this. And if you need help with a behaviorist, if you need help from your veterinarian, there's lots of people out there. We have drugs that we use for episodes of anxiety for things like thunderstorms and trips to the vet and the groomer if they're nervous.

Those are a different class of drugs than the drugs that we use generalized are separation anxiety that they're on it every day. So you're not an expert at this. You can read online, but you're not going to find the kind of information that your veterinarian has and knows about this. So please use your veterinary resources. It can be one of the technicians at the office, it can be the veterinarian, it can be one of the dog trainers that we have in our area so that you are best able to help your pet get through this because it is a big transition for them and we don't want mistakes to happen.

They're expensive, they're hard on your dog, they're hard on you, and we don't want people to have to give up their pets. We want them to be able to keep them and have a great amount of joy when you walk in the door and you're happy to be reunited with your pet and not come home and open the door and just wonder how big the mess is going to be today.

Nick Rusch:

Right. What am I walking into, right?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Exactly. Exactly. And that's the other thing is to try and keep your comings and goings a little bit low key. Don't come home and make it a big deal. Don't leave and make it a big deal. Your pet will be a lot more calm if you can leave calmly and return calmly.

Nick Rusch:

That is a great point and I think a lot of people forget that. They know when you're leaving and hey, nobody wants to go to work. We'd love to stay home with Bowzer all day. Right?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Right.

Nick Rusch:

But that's not realistic. So if you don't make it a big deal when you leave, he's going to be excited when you come home anyway no matter what happens. So there's no-

Dr. Marty Greer:

Exactly.

Nick Rusch:

Now is there a commonality Dr. and does this hit certain breeds harder than others?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Oh, I think it does, but I'm not sure that we can classify it completely by breed. I think a lot of it has to do with the source of the dog. We see a lot of the rescue dogs, the dogs that came from foster care and humane societies. We see a lot of those having more difficulties with behavior than the dogs that were raised by breeders in their home because of the

amount of transport and handling and the stress and the anxiety that these dogs went through during their transitions from Texas or Alabama or wherever they happen to come from to get to Wisconsin. These dogs have really had a difficult, short period of time in their life that has significantly influenced their ability to have good behavior. So I think it's more a matter of source than it is breed, but there's definitely dogs that are high strung and dogs that don't care.

You get a bulldog, they're like, "Just go to work. I have things to do like sleep." And then you get other dogs like Labradors that are like, "Boing. Boing. Boing," around the house. So stuffing KONG toys, freezing their food in a KONG, freezing their food in muffin tins, doing things that you can leave in the crate or leaving in the room that you've got the dog set up for that keep them busy for a longer period of time can be really helpful. If they gulp down their breakfast in 20 seconds, they don't have much to look forward to for the rest of the day.

Nick Rusch:

Right.

Dr. Marty Greer:

But if you do something like take a KONG toy or another hollow toy, stuff it full of peanut butter and their food and put it in the freezer and then let them see it, lock it in their crate when they're on the outside of the crate before you leave, they're going to be looking at the KONG toy and their crate with their breakfast in it, looking at you going, "Come on, could you get out the door? I got things to take care of here." So you can do some things to help their mindset change about how they look forward to you leaving.

So when you pick up your keys and put on your shoes, that mean you're going to work, not your fun shoes that mean you're going to the dog park, they get the difference and they start to look forward to getting into their crate and getting their breakfast that will take them two hours to eat instead of 20 seconds.

Nick Rusch:

Right.

Dr. Marty Greer:

With some thought, with some planning, you can really make this transition a much more comfortable one for your dog.

Nick Rusch:

Very smart. What about anything specific for cats, when you think about cats? Like we mentioned before that they are a little more self sufficient or they would like us to believe that anyway.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. They do try to fake us out.

Nick Rusch:

They do. That's their demeanor. "I'm a cat. I don't need you."

Dr. Marty Greer:

Exactly. Go away.

Nick Rusch:

Yeah.

Dr. Marty Greer:

So yes, we can do the same with them. We can hide things around the house. There's a feeder called Doc and Phoebe's. Doc D-O-C and Phoebe, like the woman's name.

Nick Rusch:

Sure.

Dr. Marty Greer:

You can go online at Amazon, you can buy them, and they're pretty cool because they're a way that you can hide in closets and shoes and all kinds of places. You can hide their little cat feeder that's made by Doc and Phoebe's around the house. So again, your cat has something to do all day because their only exercise is moving as the sun goes across the couch to stay in the warm spot. So that's not much activity for a cat.

Nick Rusch:

Right.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Well it's a tough job, but somebody has to do it.

Nick Rusch:

Exactly.

Dr. Marty Greer:

So if you buy these little Doc and Phoebe's feeders or some other device similar to that, you can hide them around the house. You can hide them someplace different every day. You put their food in it. And that gives them some hunting because cats really did evolve to hunt for their food. They didn't evolve to lay on our couch or hang out on the cat tree all day. So this is a nice device that you can use to manage their weight, to keep them active, and to reduce their stress and anxiety as well. And of course the same things apply as your cat needs to be accustomed to being alone for a short period and then a longer period of time. So with some of those things, we can really make this work much better I think.

Nick Rusch:

This is just an odd question and really just off the mark, but we don't have any cats, but we have a cat calendar. We are-

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah.

Nick Rusch:

Animal enthusiasts. We are animal enthusiasts without animals. That's who we are. And what's a good weight for a cat? Because these people, sometimes they're very proud of the fact that their cat is enormous. And we looked at-

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yes.

Nick Rusch:

There was a cat the other day on the cat calendar, he's 18 pounds. It's like, "No, wait a minute. That's too much cat."

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yes. That is too much cat. Unless it's the Bobcat.

Nick Rusch:

Yeah.

Dr. Marty Greer:

It shouldn't weigh that much and no one should have a Bobcat in their house. So a typical cat weighs eight to 10 pounds. Now there are-

Nick Rusch:

Eight to 10. Okay. Yeah.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Eight to 10. So the females will be a little bit smaller, the males will be a little bit bigger.

Nick Rusch:

Sure.

Dr. Marty Greer:

And there are cats that have bigger frames and that can carry 12 to 15 pounds, but generally speaking, we shouldn't see a cat much over 15 pounds, unless there's really an exceptional reason. Maybe it's a Maine Coon and it's a really large cat.

Nick Rusch:

And I know those are bigger. Yeah. I know those are bigger.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah.

Nick Rusch:

They might have three, four pounds of fur alone on those cats.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Well, maybe not, but it's still the idea that the cat should not be that large.

Nick Rusch:

Yeah. And we all-

Dr. Marty Greer:

It's important again, that we manage their weight.

Nick Rusch:

Yeah, right. And then with dogs too. When we were riding bike the other day and we saw a Corgi. Their ground clearance isn't much to start with, but this boy was barely getting by without dragging.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. And I've seen those Corgis. I've seen the 60 pound Corgis.

Nick Rusch:

Yeah.

Dr. Marty Greer:

That is not a healthy weight for a small dog.

Nick Rusch:

Not the way to go. Doc, it's always such a pleasure. We learn so much and we have so much fun talking about animals and I know that it's your life and you love it and you enjoy it. And that's what makes you a great resource, as you mentioned earlier. So let's give people the contact information where they can get ahold of you.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Sure. They can call us at 920-269-4000. Our location is at the corner of highway 41 and 49 South of Fond du Lac where the Quad/Graphics Plant is. We're kitty corner across from them. And you can find us on the web at smallanimalclinic.com or veterinaryvillage.com. If you can't spell that, I would just go to smallanimalclinic.com. That's us. We're happy to take your emails, to take your phone calls. We do telemedicine. So we do telephone consults. There's a lot of different ways you can reach us. So please reach out to us if you need some assistance. Don't just try to figure this out on your own. Veterinarians are there to help you and their staff are amazing people. So use your veterinary resources.

Nick Rusch:

It's key. Here again, it doesn't matter what is going on in your life. If you want to get the car fixed, you call somebody that has the expertise. And if you want to make sure that you're getting the most out of your animals and your relationship with your animal and keeping them healthy and happy, once again, you call the Dr. because she has the expertise. It's our pet talk Tuesday usually, but we did it on Thursday this week. It'll be the first Tuesday of October when we chat again, Dr., Is that right?

Dr. Marty Greer:

I think so.

Nick Rusch:

Okay. We'll make it work. Thanks so much. It's always a pleasure.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Great. Thank you.