

*Names have been changed to protect privacy. Portions of the training plan have been redacted to ensure it is not applied to a dog for whom these techniques may be inappropriate and/or without in-person professional guidance.

Behavioral Report for Penny Sampson 11/16/24



Basic Information

- **Dog's Name:** Penny
- **Breed:** Yellow Lab
- **Age:** 5 years
- **Sex (Spayed/Neutered):** Spayed Female
- **Owner's Name and Contact Information:** Sarah Sampson

Background Information

- **Adoption/Acquisition Date:** Adopted ~5 years ago as an 8-week-old puppy (during COVID-19 lockdown).
- **Source of Dog:** Breeder (possibly a puppy mill situation).
- **Previous Owners:** None.
- **Living Environment:** Rural home set off from a busy road. Household includes two parents, two children (ages 11 and 14), and another dog, a mixed breed named Ben. Penny is treated kindly by her family, and has no history of trauma or abuse.

Medical History

- **Recent Veterinary Exam:** Yes.
- **Current Medications:**
 - **Reconcile (fluoxetine):** 16 mg started in early September 2024, increased to 32 mg on October 26, 2024. No notable improvement observed thus far.
 - **Gabapentin:** As needed (not used during the evaluation on 11/16/24).
- **Previous Medications:**
 - **Trazodone:** Resulted in significant lethargy, loss of appetite, and weight loss. Discontinued.

- **CBD Treats:** Used for 3 months with no noticeable effect.
 - **Relevant Medical Diagnoses:** None. Blood chemistry panel was normal.
 - **Pain or Discomfort Observed:**
 - No obvious pain response during evaluation. However, arching of the back suggests potential discomfort, warranting a pain trial. Sarah noted that she did nip in response to having her paw handled.
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Behavioral History

- **Primary Behavior Concern:** Severe generalized anxiety disorder.
- **When Did the Behavior Start?**
 - Anxiety has been present since puppyhood but was manageable, with recovery from fear episodes occurring within minutes.
 - Anxiety significantly worsened in the summer of 2024, likely exacerbated by a temporary housing change.
 - It is noted that she does not appear as anxious at the groomers, and is still capable of enjoying a car ride.
- **Change in Housing:**
 - The family home was physically moved farther off a busy road. During this transition, Penny stayed with Sarah's mother where her anxiety escalated. This temporary home was across the street from the previous home. It was a calm environment, with no children or other animals (with the exception of Ben.). Upon returning to the family home in August 2024, her anxiety remained severe and has continued to deteriorate.
- **Frequency and Duration of Anxiety Episodes:** Nearly constant anxiety, even in the absence of apparent triggers.
- **Common Triggers:**
 - Everyday noises and movements, including those from family members (e.g., children moving around the house).
 - Familiar sounds, such as the excavator in the yard - which is run daily, as well as unfamiliar sounds.
 - Changes in routine or environment.
- **Anxiety Manifestations:**
 - Panting, pacing, trembling, and hiding.
 - Hypervigilance and avoidance behaviors.
 - Lack of interest in toys or treats; refusal to eat in stressful situations.
 - Destructive behavior when left alone.

- Obsessed with escaping the house when left alone, including breaking doors, unlocking locks, and injuring herself during escape attempts.
 - No self-mutilating behaviors. Injuries included broken teeth and other injuries related to breaking out of the crate or attempting to escape the home.
 - Preference for isolation when family is home, often hiding in another room.
 - **Intensity Level of Anxiety:** Severe.
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Observations (11/16/24 Evaluation)

I spent 1 hour and 20 minutes inside the home with Penny, Sarah, and 10-year-old Emma.

- **Initial Greeting:**
 - Penny greeted me by jumping up, initially presenting as a typical happy lab.
 - Signs of anxiety appeared immediately: trembling, tail tucking, ears pulled back, tight facial muscles, slight salivation, panting (spatula tongue), and stress yawning.
 - Refused high-value treats (roisserie chicken and cheese) except for a few pieces placed directly at her paws when she laid next to Sarah.
- **Behavior Progression:**
 - Within minutes, Penny slunk away to hide behind a coat rack. (Sarah noted this was an unusual hiding spot, as she typically hides in the bathroom, under a bed, or in a corner.)
 - When offered a peanut butter-smear bowl, she surprised the family by accepting it, showing brief engagement. She was able to finish the treat, licking the bowl clean.
 - Penny emerged about 10 minutes later but moved cautiously, making herself small and cramming into a corner. (No head-pressing was noted.)
 - While not fearful of me, she displayed significant stress from my presence.
 - Emma brushed Penny, which appeared to reduce her anxiety slightly.
 - A lightly weighted blanket was placed over Penny, possibly helping to reduce trembling. This prompted a recommendation to try a **Thundershirt®** and noise-reducing earmuffs.
 - Throughout the session, Penny's tail remained tightly tucked, with rare wags.

- **Potential Pain Indicators:**
 - Penny's back was occasionally arched as she walked, which may suggest discomfort. No reaction to palpation was observed, but a pain trial is strongly recommended.
 - **Challenges:**
 - Penny's inability to consistently take treats or engage made it impossible to implement reward-based training during the session.
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Assessment of Anxiety

- **Range of Triggers:** Extremely broad, including everyday noises, vibrations, and routine family activities.
 - **Underlying Motivations or Emotional States:** Hyperawareness and hypersensitivity to her environment.
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Training and Intervention Plan

1. **Management Strategies:**
 - Maintain a consistent daily routine to minimize unpredictability.
 - Create a designated safe space for Penny (described later).
 - Experiment with calming tools:
 - White noise machines.
 - Thundershirt®.
 - Noise-reducing earmuffs.
 - Pheromone diffusers or collars.
 - Lick mats, or other activities that encourage licking.
 - Test out different treats to spread, such as baby food, pumpkin, plain yogurt, peanut butter, cottage cheese, cream cheese, sweet potato.
 - Try freezing it with interesting additions, such as sardines, blueberries, tuna, diced chicken, etc.
 - Behavior when left alone remains a challenge due to her ability to escape all enclosures. The hope is that if we can reduce her anxiety, this behavior will improve.
2. **Behavior Modification Techniques:**

- Penny's current anxiety levels make desensitization and counterconditioning impractical. Focus on improving her comfort through management and potential medication adjustments.
3. **Training Goals:**
- **Short-term:** Reduce the frequency and intensity of anxiety-related behaviors.
 - **Long-term:** Build confidence and improve Penny's ability to cope with new or stressful situations.
4. **Owner Involvement:**
- Keep a behavior journal to track triggers, anxiety signs, and successful interventions. Set up a camera to observe her behavior when alone.
 - Encourage Penny to use her designated safe space.
 - Introduce the **1-2-3 Pattern Game** when Penny shows readiness (calm enough to take treats).
 - If possible, try to minimize noise levels for a few days and remain at home with Penny to monitor any changes in her behavior. During this time, consider using white noise in the background to create a calm and consistent environment.
 - While it's likely that Penny may "look for" stimuli that trigger her anxiety, the use of white noise could help reduce her overall stress levels and provide valuable insights into her responses.
5. **Veterinary Recommendations / Questions to Discuss:**
- **Medication Adjustments:** Could we explore alternative medications that may be particularly effective for treating noise sensitivities or generalized anxiety?
 - **Pain Trial:** Would it be worthwhile to evaluate for any potential underlying pain that might be contributing to Penny's behavior?
 - **Additional Testing:** Are there any minimally invasive diagnostic tests, such as a thyroid panel, that could help rule out underlying medical causes for her anxiety?

These are just suggestions to consider based on observations during our sessions. The vet's expertise and guidance will be invaluable in determining the best path forward for Penny.

Recommendations for Additional Support

- **Veterinary Behaviorist:** Dr. Michelle Posage, (603) 589-4848
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Signatures

- **Behavior Consultant/Trainer:** Elizabeth Beaulieu, IAABC-CDBC, ADT
 - **Date:** 11/16/24
 - **Peer Review:** [REDACTED],
IAABC-CDBC, CPDT-KA
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Setting up a Safe Space:

Video → [Safe Spaces for Fearful Dogs](#)

Step 1: Set Up the Safe Space

1. **Location:** Choose a quiet, low-traffic area of your home where your dog already feels relatively comfortable.
 2. **Crate or Bed:** Use an open crate, a covered bed, or a cozy nook. A crate with a cover can mimic a den-like environment, but it should always remain open for her to enter and exit voluntarily.
 3. **Comfortable Environment:** Add soft bedding, her favorite toys, and maybe an old t-shirt or blanket that smells like you. Avoid adding anything that might roll or make noise (e.g., squeaky toys) if she startles easily.
 4. **Calming Elements:** Place a white noise machine or calming diffuser (like Adaptil) nearby to reduce stress.
 5. There should be a water bowl
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Step 2: Teach Her to Use the Space

1. **Introduce the Space Positively:** Sit near the safe space and gently encourage her to explore it. If she is able to take treats, toss them in for her to find. Let her investigate at her own pace without pressure.
2. **Reward Voluntary Use:** Any time she steps into or even near the safe space, reward her calmly with treats or praise.

3. **Pair it with Calm Activities:** Give her long-lasting chews, stuffed Kongs, or puzzle toys in the safe space. This helps her associate the area with comfort and relaxation.
 4. **Practice with Neutral Scenarios:** Encourage her to use the space during non-stressful times so she doesn't only associate it with anxiety-provoking events.
 5. **Gradual Exposure:** If she hides under the bed during specific triggers (e.g., thunderstorms, visitors), guide her to the safe space before she becomes overly stressed. Don't force her if she resists.
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Safe Space Rules

1. **No Forced Use:** Never force her into the space; it must remain a voluntary retreat.
2. **Respect Boundaries:** Make it a rule that family members (and other pets) do not disturb her when she's in the space. This is especially important for children to understand.
 - a. For example, nobody should go into her space, and put a leash on her. This takes her autonomy away. If you need her to leave her space, encourage her to come out in another way. When she emerges, be sure there is ample time between her leaving the safe space, and any activity she may view as stressful.
3. **No Negative Associations:** It should be a place where she always feels secure and at ease.

Keep It Accessible: Ensure she can access the safe space at all times, even when you're not home.

Training Technique: 1-2-3 Pattern Game

Goal: Your dog will stay calm and focused when you begin counting in repetitive sets of 3.

Background information:

This technique is designed to help your dog stay focused and calm in challenging environments. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Basic Instructions

- Begin in a quiet, distraction-free setting. Your dog should *not* be stressed when you introduce this game.
- Hold a treat in your closed palm, and put your hand at your dog's nose.
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]

Tips

- [REDACTED]

[illegible]