

Playing a Different Tune For Your Dog

Calming music soothes stressed-out dogs, advocates say.

Patricia Kime

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"I first started leaving the television on when he was a puppy," Dobbins said. "I didn't want anything hard or hyper, and I figured since I had a Texas accent and like country, he might enjoy it."

Apparently, he does. When Dobbins left Moose with a dog sitter for a week, he settled in at her house near the television, even if VHI was on.

"He likes to be in front of the TV with us," Dobbins said. "He thinks he's socializing. It just calms the dog. I don't know why."

Some researchers believe people can suffer from "seasonal affective disorder," once called the winter blues or cabin fever, because they are exposed to less natural light during the cold season.

Does light make a difference in other animals' lives? In dreary places, do canines get the doggie doldrums?

Employees at Benton-Franklin Humane Society in Pasco, Wash., believe so. It's one reason they renovated their kennel walls with glass block. The block is impervious to moisture and scratch resistant, allowing for a healthier, cleaner environment. It also lets in light, providing a more natural, outdoorsy feeling and allowing dogs to see their neighbors.

"People may think this is crazy, but imagine how depressing it must be to be surrounded by cinder blocks," Executive Director Diane Webber said.

The Pennsylvania Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in Philadelphia renovated its adoption area in glass block and is remodeling all kennels with skylights and greenhouse-type glass walls. While there's no evidence the dogs are happier, the humans who visit are surprised by the beautiful structure, executive director Eric Hendricks said.

"They come in expecting a gloomy, institutional-like structure, and they find light pouring in," Hendricks said.

That sets a positive tone with the visitors. Adoptions are increasing, and the shelter is receiving more community recognition.

Hendricks figures that what pleases people probably makes the dogs happy. "I guess if you wanted to hearken back a few thousand years, when the sky was (a dog's) roof, it's more like that," he said.

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