

Spooking



ASK ISA

—Isa Helfrich, German Shepherd & therapy dog
(typed by Deb Helfrich, Vice President)

QUESTION:

Dear Isa, sometimes at the nursing home, the breathing machines and medical stuff the elders need scares me. When I get scared, I'm all mixed up—ready to run in case one of those beeping menaces decides to grab me and ready to defend myself if I can't get away. When my person sees this, she pats me all over and coos to me and tells me I'm being a good dog. I get so confused because my person is telling me "good boy" when I'm terrified and ready to run! Does this mean I **should** be scared of something? Does it mean being scared is the right thing to do?

✱ Taffy, the Great Dane

ANSWER:

Dear Taffy,

First off, I know there can be lots of weird machines when you go visiting—but they are all pretty nice (well, they're not very social, but they don't try to steal your attention either). So, even if they do seem like they are hissing at you (ah—sidenote, be careful with cats—they don't all like to be chased), there's nothing to be scared of.

This part is for your person--when your pup gets scared, be happy, calm, and ignore the scared-ness! Show your dog it's no big deal by making it no big deal! If you are calm, cool beans and not freaked out by the funny machine, then your dog will take your lead. Even though you want comfort and reassure your pup, by patting and saying it's okay—you're telling your pup he has a REASON to be scared and rewarding him for being scared—confusing! When your pup is all calmed down and feeling pretty good about the machine, THEN give lots of pats. And, of course, giving your pup cookies is a GREAT idea—and ice cream, a couple hotdogs, a burger...

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