

Fear of Thunder or Other Loud Noises

The most common behavior problems associated with fear of loud noises are destruction, escaping, hiding, and shaking. These behaviors can result in physical injury to your dog. Try the tips below and please remember to also talk to your veterinarian.

What Can You Do To Help?

Create a Safe Place: This must be a safe location from your dog's perspective as well as yours. Notice where she goes, or tries to go, when she's frightened. If it's safe to do so, give her access to that place. If she's trying to get inside the house, consider bringing her inside proactively or install a dog door so she has a free choice. Encourage her to go to her safe place when you're home and there are no scary noises. Feed her in that location, praise her for going there, and give her treats when she is calmly in that space. She must be able to come and go from this location freely and think of it as a very safe place to go. When the startling noises occur, she will hopefully go to this place and feel calmer for being there.

Distract Your Dog: This method works best when you notice your dog is just watchful of the noise but is not yet anxious about it. At this point, immediately engage her in doing something that she really enjoys. Get out the tennis ball and play fetch (in an escape proof area) or practice some fun tricks that she knows. If the noise builds, you may not be able to keep her attention on the activity, but it might delay the start of the fearful behavior for longer and longer each time you do it. If you can't keep her attention and she begins acting afraid, **immediately stop the process**. If you continue, you may inadvertently cause her to become fearful of the game as she may associate the game as a predictor of loud noises.

Remain Calm and Confident: It is totally fine to sit with your dog and pet her if this helps her relax. Gentle massage and t-touch techniques can also soothe. Remember to breathe deeply and stay relaxed yourself. Your calm behavior could help your dog.

Keep your distance. Don't try to force your dog to experience or be close to the sound that frightens her. Making her stay close to a group of children who are lighting firecrackers will only make her more afraid, and could cause her to become aggressive in an attempt to escape from the situation.

Behavior Modification: This consists of desensitizing your dog to a very low level of the noise, so low that it doesn't cause her to have any anxiety. You then use counter conditioning by pairing the low level sound with something pleasant, like a treat or a fun game. As long as she continues to take the treats and remain calm, the volume can be gradually increased. Through this process, she'll come to associate "good things" with the previously feared sound. As with the distraction technique, immediately stop if she becomes anxious and go back to the previous level. There are ready-made noise CDs available for this purpose - or you could make your own.

Consult Your Veterinarian: Options and resources may be available through your veterinarian to accompany behavior modification.

Dog Training classes won't make your dog less afraid of thunder or other noises, but they could help boost her general confidence.

Ideas For Known Firework Days

- Go to a place where fireworks are banned - or a place you know is quiet and at a far distance from a display.
- Book yourself into a pet friendly hotel at the airport. Their rooms are usually more soundproof and not in an area where fireworks are set off.
- If you have a basement, go watch a movie downstairs with your dog. The sounds from fireworks are usually muted in a basement.

Remember to do these things proactively. It is easier to remain calm than to relax after already feeling anxious.

Other Resources

- **Adaptil** is a synthetic pheromone that may help reduce the signs of stress-related behaviors.
- **Flower Essences** may help your dog deal with stressful situations.
- **ThunderShirt** is a swaddling shirt that may relieve anxiety by applying gentle, constant pressure.
- **Tellington T-Touch Method** uses gentle touches to help relieve tension and increase body awareness. It may help calm your fearful dog.

Need help? Call our free pet behavior help line at (503) 416-2983.