



Fear of Thunder or Other Loud Noises

It is not uncommon for dogs to be frightened of thunder, fireworks and 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.

Create a Safe Place: Try to create a safe place for your dog to go to when they hear frightening noises. This must be a safe location from their perspective as well as yours. Notice where they go, or tries to go, when frightened. If it's safe to do so, give them access to that place. Encourage them to go to the safe place when you're home and there are no scary noises. They must be able to come and go from this location freely. When the startling noises occur, they will hopefully go to this place and feel safer for being there. This place can be a "quieter" room, covered crate etc.

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 them in doing something that they really enjoy. Get out the tennis ball and play fetch (in an escape proof area) or practice some fun tricks. If the noise builds, you may not be able to keep their 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 their attention and they begin acting afraid, immediately stop the process. If you continue, you may inadvertently cause them to become fearful of the game as they 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 them if this helps them to relax. Gentle massage 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 them. Making them stay close to a group of children who are lighting firecrackers will only make them more afraid and could cause them to become aggressive in an attempt to escape from the situation or attempt to get free and flee.

Behavior Modification: This consists of desensitizing your dog to a very low level of the noise, so low that it doesn't cause them 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 they continue to take the treats and remain calm, the volume can be gradually increased. Through this process, they'll come to associate "good things" with the previously feared sound. As with the distraction technique, immediately stop if they become anxious and go back to the previous level.

Use Decentralization and Counter Conditioning (DSCC): If the dog has fears of loud noises like fireworks, look up YouTube videos and play them in the background (altering the volume based on what a dog can handle) at the same time reward the dog with a high value reward (hot dog, cheeseburger, lunch meat, cheese). With continued work the dog will pair these formally loud scary noises with something yummy food and create a positive association.

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.