



My Dog is Scared of Noises

Dogs have extremely sensitive hearing and can hear things humans can't, so imagine how frightening it is when extremely loud noises happen without any warning. Research suggests that fears of loud noises are common in the dog population, with almost half of owners reporting that their dogs show signs of fear or anxiety in response to loud, unpredictable noises like fireworks, thunderstorms and gunshots.

What do dogs do when they are scared?

Some dogs show obvious behavioural responses such as running from room to room, pacing up and down, being destructive, trembling, urinating, barking or whining. Others have more subtle ways of showing distress, such as clingy behaviour, excessive salivation, or licking lips. These dogs may be equally distressed, so it's important to recognise and address their fear.

Immediate things you can do to help your dog

Block out sounds as much as possible. Shut windows and play music or have the TV on to drown out the noise. Shut curtains and turn the lights on to help muffle the noises and make sure that your dog cannot see the flashes of fireworks or lightning.

Avoid taking your dog out when there might be a risk of scary noises occurring –walk your dog earlier in the day, in the case of fireworks season.

Stay calm and follow your normal routine. Doing something different from usual may cause your dog to worry even more. For example, going to the window is likely to draw your dog's attention to what is going on outside.

If your dog dashes about or does something annoying, don't tell them off. Your dog is behaving like this because they are scared, and it is counter-productive to get angry.

Create a safe, secure 'den' and soundproof it as much as possible. Make the space quite small so they can squeeze in, this will help give them a sense of security. This could be a space in an under-stairs cupboard filled with blankets, or an indoor kennel or crate you can make more 'den-like' by putting blankets inside and covering with thick blankets to deaden the sound.

Try to introduce your dog to their den when there are no scary noises or flashes, so they become familiar with it being a safe place. If you introduce it for the first time when your dog is frightened, they may not use it - in which case don't try and force them.

If your dog hides away, leave them alone, they're trying to do what works best to cope with the noises. Don't approach or try to move them as this could scare your dog even more and may even result in aggression.

Your dog may seek your reassurance when worried by noises, as a short-term solution we recommend that you let them do this. In the long term it's better that your dog is not reliant on your attention when they're worried – but changing this is a long-term training aim, not something to start when your dog is panicking.

Longer term treatment

If you think that your dog gets worried by loud noises, contact your vet to see if there's an underlying health problem first, and to help you find a qualified behaviourist. Your vet will also be able to discuss whether medication might be helpful.

Programmes of behaviour therapy recommended will vary for each dog, but may include the following elements:

Establishing a consistent way for your dog to cope. This often involves teaching a dog to use a den to hide when they are worried. This might require you to gradually change your dog's 'coping' response away from one that relies on your attention so that they are more able to cope with loud noises if they occur when you're not home.

Gradually teaching your dog that noises are not scary through a process called 'desensitisation and counter-conditioning'. This usually involves playing recorded versions of the scary noises but starting at such a low volume that your dog is not worried by them. The volume and direction of sounds are changed over time, but so slowly that your dog does not show any signs of fear. The sounds should also be associated with something that they enjoy, such as high value treats or a game.

If your dog is showing signs that they are very afraid of noises speak to your vet first to make sure there isn't a medical reason for this. Your vet can then refer you to a behaviourist for further support.

Professionally qualified and experienced behaviourists can create individually tailored programmes for owners to follow to change their dog's behaviour.

Dogs Trust provide lifelong behavioural support for all our adopted dogs. If you need help for your Dogs Trust Dog please email: reception@dogstrust.ie

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