



If your dog is afraid of sudden noises then life can be miserable for both of you. Summer thunderstorms can become a major trauma and unless you live in a remote part of the country there is almost no way of avoiding the fireworks. These loud sounds can turn your pet into a nervous wreck. There are some simple tips to make the whole experience more bearable for you both, but to find a solution to the problem you will need to seek some expert help.

What is a noise phobia?

Noise phobia simply means an unnatural fear of noise. It seems to affect dogs more than other animals and is most commonly a problem associated with a fear of fireworks or thunder.

Why does my dog have a noise phobia?

Dogs often start with a simple unease around loud noises and this develops into a phobia because of personal experiences. Some breeds of dogs are more 'highly strung' than others and these may become nervous. There is also a family influence with some puppies learning fearful behaviour from their mother.

What can be done to help my dog?

Unfortunately noise phobia can be a tricky problem to sort out. It is possible to teach your dog not to be afraid but this takes many months and if your dog has a noise phobia you will want to do something about it now.

How do I cope in the short-term?

For the immediate period around likely exposure to fireworks, thunder or other noises that frighten him, try to keep your dog in the house. Many dogs will try to escape from the noise by running away and the last you thing you want is a panic-stricken dog out on the streets. Keep your dog in a bright room with the curtains drawn and provide plenty of background noise to try and mask the external sounds. Noisy music or the television usually provides relatively good cover. If you are intending to use earplugs in your dog be very careful. It is quite easy to damage your dog's ear by pushing something into it. A rolled up piece of cotton wool can be fitted into the ear but always make sure that you remove it as soon as the noise has stopped. Anything left in the ear can set up a nasty infection.

Stay with your dog and try to ignore the noises outside. Act as you would do normally and if possible try to distract your pet by playing a game. If your pet has a friend who is not scared of noise invite that dog over for the evening and play boisterous games with him and try to encourage your own dog to join in. For some dogs with a severe phobia the only solution is a short course of sedatives or calming drugs at the time the noise is likely to be worst. These drugs must be given before your dog becomes upset otherwise they can sometimes make the problem worse. Always discuss the issues with your vet and only use treatment under their guidance.

How should I handle the problem?

Never punish your pet for their behaviour when they are afraid. They will only learn to associate the punishment with the noise and become even more disturbed. Try not to make a big fuss of your pet when they appear nervous. Act normally and praise them if they do the same.

Once the immediate problem is over think about getting some professional help for your pet. Your vet will be able to refer you to a specialist in animal behaviour who can help you with desensitisation therapy to re-train your dog not to be afraid. Although this can be a long process if you start soon you should have your dog fit to face the music by next year.

What is desensitising therapy?

A pet behaviourist will help you to make your dog less sensitive to sudden loud noises - this is desensitisation. The basic principle is to let your dog experience quiet noises in a situation where he does not feel afraid. He is then praised for being unafraid. Once he gets used to this process the level of noise is gradually increased, but only to a level where he always feels confident. If he is ever afraid of the noise the

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level is reduced until he feels safe again.

Having a phobia is no fun for your dog and can be very distressing for you. Most phobias get worse with time and they will not go away unless you do something about it. Seek some help while it is fresh in your mind.

If you want any other information on health issues concerning your dog please contact Orwell Veterinary Group on 01473 333677 and we will be happy to advise you.