

Noise Phobias in Dogs

Overview

- Is your dog afraid of loud noises? Do they run, cower, hide, tremor, bark, seek attention or toilet in the house?
- The best way to prevent a noise phobia is to expose your dog to sights and sounds at a young age.
- The good news is that it's never too late to improve a noise phobia.
- Contact your vet if your dog is scared of certain noises, they will assess them and recommend a treatment plan.

General information



Dogs are very sensitive to noise, and can hear a much broader range of frequencies than humans can. So, what seems like a quiet, far away noise to you, could be very loud for your dog.

If your dog is sensitive to a certain noise, it could be because of a bad experience in the past, or simply because they didn't experience that sound when they were young. In some cases, noise sensitivities can be brought on by pain, so always speak to your vet if your dog has developed an uncharacteristic fear of noise.

If your dog is showing signs of a noise phobia, seek professional help before the problem gets any worse. Left untreated, noise phobias usually get progressively worse over time.

A dog can become afraid of almost any noise, but common triggers include fireworks, thunder and lightning, vacuum cleaners and cars.

Symptoms



Every dog acts differently to fear. Some freeze, show the whites of their eyes, cower, run away, and hide, whereas others bark, growl, seek attention, or do something destructive like digging or chewing. If your dog is very frightened, they may also toilet in the house.

When to contact your vet

Symptoms of noise phobias tend to get worse over time, so it's best to contact your vet as soon as you notice your dog showing any problems, even if they are very mild. They will check them for any health problems and discuss the best next steps to get them some

help. It's likely your vet will recommend that your dog is seen by an accredited behaviourist.

Am I eligible for PDSA veterinary treatment?

Treatment and Outlook

The good news is that with the correct help, time and patience, many dogs with noise phobias improve.

'Desensitisation and counterconditioning' - this is a structured plan to reintroduce your dog to the things that they are frightened of (at a low level so not to upset them), while using something positive (like a treat) to help them learn not to be afraid. A desensitisation and counterconditioning plan can be created with the support and guidance of your vet, vet nurse or an accredited behaviourist.

Behaviour modifying medications - if your pet is extremely scared (i.e. they tremble, dribble, try to escape, hiding, pace, bark or perform destructive behaviours) it's unlikely that desensitisation and counterconditioning alone will help. Your vet might prescribe your dog some medications to use alongside their training program.

Never attempt to use any medications that haven't been prescribed by your vet, (for example human anti-anxiety medications). Talk to your vet about which medication is best for your dog.

Calming aids - there are a number of different calming supplements and aids available that are marketed to help relax your dog. Some have a lot of great evidence to prove that they work, but sadly many don't, and some even contain ingredients that can be harmful or interfere with prescribed medications. Speak to your vet or accredited behaviourist about which supplements might be best for your dog.

Helping at home

There are many different ways you can help your dog at home. Here are our top tips:

- **Stay calm.** It's very important to stay calm, panicking will make your dog feel more anxious.
- **Shut windows, blinds and curtains** to reduce noise in the house.
- **Turn on the TV or radio** to help cover sounds from outside.
- **Don't leave your dog alone.** Stay in for the evening if you know a storm is coming, or there's a firework display nearby. Your dog may need comfort, or to hide on their own, either way it's important that you're home.
- **Comfort your dog if they come to you.** There is a myth that people shouldn't comfort their pet when they are scared because it might make them worse. However here, we are dealing with an emotion – fear. You can't reinforce an emotion your dog is feeling, only a behaviour such as sit, stay, down etc. It's fine to comfort your pet and will help to relax them (though be aware that some dogs may prefer to be left alone). Think of something you are terrified of. Imagine you are stuck in a room, full of that scary thing, with nowhere to escape to. In one scenario, your best friend is with you, but ignoring you, and when you try to seek reassurance, they keep ignoring you. In the other scenario, your best friend gives you your favourite food, a comforting hug, and a safe place to hide. Which one would make you feel better?
- **Give your dog treats or toys.** Distract your dog by playing with them or giving them some tasty treats during the fireworks/storm.
- **Make a den or safe place.** If your dog has a crate, make it into a den by covering it with lots of blankets. If they don't use a crate, make a comfortable, enclosed space for them. Never force them to use a den if they aren't keen.
- **Try using a pheromone diffuser or collar** to help your dog feel calm.

Prevention

The best way to stop your dog being afraid of noises is to introduce them to lots of different sights and sounds in a positive way while they are a puppy. There are many free resources available online, such as sound tracks of fireworks and storms. Always introduce your puppy to new experiences slowly (i.e. play the sound clips quietly to begin with), and make it positive by rewarding them with a treat or their favourite toy.

Once your dog is an adult, you can help prepare them for loud noises by taking a few simple steps:

- **Use a sound CD or playlist** which will help your dog become used to the noises that they're afraid of. It's important to start at a very low volume and make sure your dog associates the noises with good things such as play time or treats. Gradually increase the volume by small amount over a few weeks, again praising calm behaviour. If your dog becomes stressed at any point, it's best to reduce the sound and build their confidence a little more slowly.
- **Make new noises a positive experience** by praising them in a happy tone. This will help your dog to become more confident around new things.
- **Always stay calm.** The more worried you get, the more worried your dog is likely to get. If they are showing signs of stress and being afraid, stay as calm as possible as this will help them feel more at ease.
- **Contact your vet and an accredited behaviourist.**

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