

GETTING YOUR DOG USED TO FIREWORKS AND LOUD NOISES

Life in general can be very noisy, and many dogs find loud noises scary and stressful. Desensitising your dog to loud noises is a good way to keep them calm in situations that may otherwise make them anxious.

While there are things you can do to calm your dog during a period of loud noises, such as fireworks, or Bonfire night, getting your dog used to loud sounds can be a better long-term solution. By gradually desensitising your dog to loud noises over a period of time, you can teach them to associate these sounds with something positive, instead of something to be scared of.

This process should be carried out over a gradual period of time and can take months. We're going to use fireworks as an example, however, if it's too late to do this, we have some tips on how to manage your dog's stress during loud noises too.



You can watch our video about desensitising your dog to loud noises on the Battersea YouTube channel

HOW TO MAKE YOUR DOG LESS STRESSED BY LOUD NOISES

Before you start, you will need to buy or stream some related sound effects or noises, such as fireworks, and have some way of playing them out loud.

It's important that the training is done with your dog indoors, away from distractions, and make sure your dog can easily leave the room if they want to. (If they do choose to leave this could be an indicator that you have progressed too quickly and need to go back a few steps in the training).

To begin with, get your dog settled in the room and play the sounds they are least scared of at the lowest possible volume.

Increase the volume very, very slowly, until you see the first signs that your dog is reacting to the noise. A reaction might be small, such as twitching their ears. Once your dog starts to react, leave the sounds at that volume for a few minutes to let them get used to it.

If at any point your dog is scared or stressed by the noise, remain calm and stop playing the sounds immediately. This means you may have progressed too quickly, so start from a lower volume next time.

Play the sounds at this low level for 5-10 minutes, 3-4 times a day. Once your dog has stopped responding to the noise, you can turn the volume up slightly, until they begin to respond again. Again, if your dog shows any signs of stress, stop the sounds and start at a lower volume the next day.

Keep playing the sounds in this way daily, over a period of weeks, until your dog no longer reacts to the sounds, even at a higher volume.

BUILDING A POSITIVE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN YOUR DOG AND LOUD NOISES

Once your dog's been desensitised to the sounds, you can start to build a positive association between your dog and loud noises, such as fireworks.

To start, prepare your dog's food or get out one of their toys. If they get excited, sit down calmly for a few minutes and let them settle before starting the training session.

Once your dog has calmed down, play the sounds at a very low volume again. If possible, start it with a remote control so your dog doesn't see you do it.

As soon as you hear the sounds give your dog their food or start to play with them. Once your dog has finished eating or playing, turn off the sounds straight away. This is so that they start to associate the sound with something positive happening.

Do this a few times over the course of a few days until your dog starts to get excited when they hear the sounds. Once your dog has made this initial connection you can begin to increase the volume a little each time.

Eventually your dog will begin to associate the sounds with something enjoyable like eating or playing, and it will be much easier to keep them calm in noisy situations.

Once your dog is less reactive and their emotional response to loud sounds has changed, we would still recommend taking steps to manage their stress in specific situations. Fireworks for example are a common trigger for dogs to become stressed and worried. Take a look at our advice on keeping your dog calm during firework season itself. Even if your dog seems comfortable with the sound of fireworks, we still wouldn't recommend taking them to a display.

If your dog is still stressed by loud noises after trying these steps, you should consult your vet for further advice.

DOGS AND FIREWORKS

Unlike a lot of humans, dogs can be scared of fireworks. The loud noises and flashing lights of fireworks can be very frightening for your dog, but there are things you can do to minimise your dog's stress levels. Here are our top tips for managing dogs and fireworks.

While there are things you can do to calm your dog during fireworks, getting your dog used to loud sounds can be a better long-term solution. By gradually desensitising your dog to loud noises over a period of time, you can teach them to associate these sounds with something positive, instead of something to be scared of.

10 WAYS TO HELP YOUR DOG THROUGH FIREWORKS SEASON

1. **Avoid letting your dog outdoors at times when fireworks are likely to go off**

Take your dog for a nice long walk well before dark. For most of the year it's against the law to set fireworks off after 11pm, but this curfew is extended to midnight on Bonfire Night so try to tire your dog out before it gets dark and then take them out for final toilet walks once the fireworks have stopped. If your dog is particularly scared of fireworks, you may want to feed them early too. If you have time, introduce these changes gradually over a few days so you don't suddenly disrupt your dog's routine.



2. **Create a 'safe place' inside your home for your dog to hide from fireworks**

A table draped with a blanket is a great retreat, or if your dog is used to being in a crate, cover it and leave it open with blankets inside. Don't lock your dog in the crate, as this can be even more stressful for them. Give your dog options so they can choose where to hide.

3. **The sudden bang of fireworks can be masked by keeping a radio or TV on, which can reduce the impact noises may have on your pet**

Classical music will help to calm dogs in general, and music with quite a h4 bass will be ideal for masking bangs when played at a volume that your dog is happy with.

4. **Always draw the curtains or cover the windows to minimise the lights from the fireworks**

It's not only the sound of fireworks that can cause distress for dogs, it's also the light and flashes across the sky. Leave lights on indoors to reduce the impact of the flashes too.

5. **Don't confine your dog to one room as they may hurt themselves trying to get out, particularly if they become stressed**

Dogs may also be most comfortable curled up in their usual spot with you rather than a designated 'safe place', so allow them access to all safe areas of the house.

6. **Make sure that your dogs are microchipped and that their microchip details are up to date**

In the worst-case scenario, any dog that does get out or run away from home while fireworks are going off can be reunited with its owner much more easily if it has been microchipped. Microchipping your dog is now a legal requirement, as of April 2016.

7. **If your dog can see that fireworks have no effect on you, this may help decrease their anxiety**

Animals are highly perceptive and will notice if you're behaving unusually. Following your dog around or being overly affectionate may cause them to feel nervous or confused. You can still reassure your pet, by playing with their favourite toy for example but try to behave as normally as possible. The more you change your behaviour, the more anxious your dog may become.

8. **Make sure your home and garden are as escape-proof as possible**

Make sure all doors and windows are closed firmly. If possible, make sure your dog doesn't have access to doors that lead outside, especially when people are coming in or out of the house. Secure any escape routes in your garden, just in case, and make sure everyone in the house knows they need to be quick opening and closing external doors.

9. Provide dogs with a long-lasting chew to help keep them distracted

You can buy a Pedigree Jumbone from the shop here at Battersea for your dog to enjoy, and you can also help keep the dogs in our kennels calm by donating a chew to one of our dogs via our online shop to help keep them calm. You could also try stuffing a puzzle toy such as a Kong with layers of food to keep your dog occupied.

10. If your dog is still extremely stressed by fireworks after following our advice, you may want to consult your vet

A vet may be able to provide medication to help reduce your pet's anxiety – however, any medicinal treatment should always be accompanied by a behaviour management plan.