

Sound Fears

Managing Sound Fears in Dogs and Cats A Long-Term Strategy



📞 Book a consultation with us to develop a personalised, long-term strategy for your dog or cat's sound-related fears. Our experienced team is here to help your pet feel safe and confident.

Please get in touch with our friendly team on 01858 462 839 if you have any queries or visit www.ashtreevets.co.uk

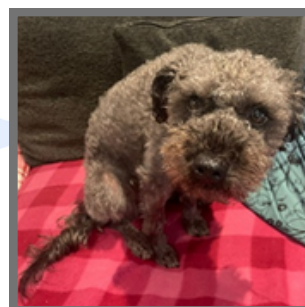
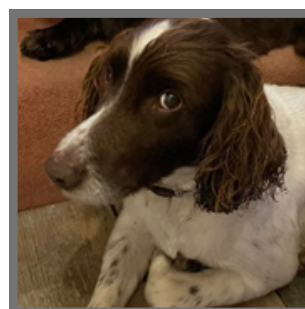
Understanding Sound Fears in Dogs

Fireworks and thunderstorms are two of the most common noise events that cause sound fear in dogs. One study suggested 49% of the UK dog population show signs of sound related fears – that's nearly half of all our dogs. Sound fears can escalate over time so managing them early is important to try to prevent this.

Recognising Signs of Fear or Anxiety

These signs can vary between dogs and range from subtle to extreme. They include:

- Lip licking
- Yawning (when your dog is not tired)
- Whale eye (showing the white of the eye)
- Panting
- Pacing
- Tucking their tail under
- Shaking/trembling
- Hiding/cowering
- Barking/vocalising
- Trying to escape the room/house



"Proud member of the VetPartners Family"

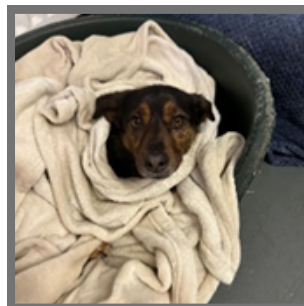
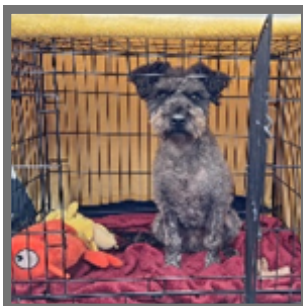
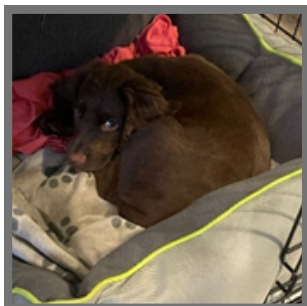
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Preparing for a Noise Event

Create a Safe Hiding Place

- Your dog may already have chosen a place where they prefer to hide. This hiding place should be in an area of the house that is the most soundproofed.
- The hiding place MUST be available to your dog at all times of the day and year, regardless of whether you are at home with them (this is because events like thunderstorms can occur at any time).
- Make the hiding place comfortable for them with bedding. If they are crate trained you can use a crate (with the door kept open) and drape blankets over it to make a den.
- Ensure your dog is familiar with the hiding place and sees it as a safe place to go. It should be set up as early as possible to give them time to get used to it. Encourage them to visit by dropping treats there or giving them something to chew while they sit there.
- If you have more than one dog they should each have their own hiding place.



Use Pheromones & Supplements

- Use a pheromone diffuser (e.g. Adaptil, Pet Remedy) that is plugged in near to your dog's hiding place. It is best to turn these on at least 2 weeks before a known noise event (e.g. Firework Night). They should be kept switched on at all times and not be placed underneath tables/shelves.
- There are also a variety of nutraceuticals that may help with stress/anxiety.



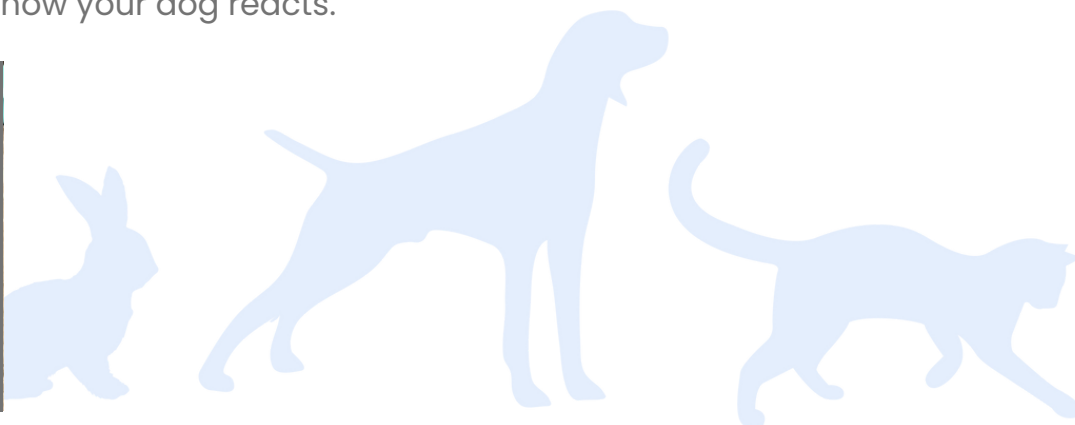
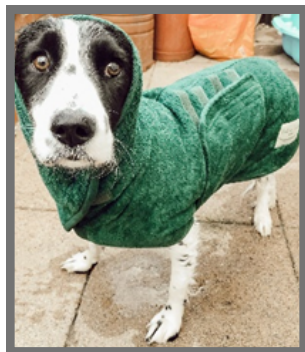


Preparing for a Noise Event...(continued)

Use a Thundershirt/Anxiety Jacket

Thundershirts and anxiety jackets provide gentle, constant pressure which some dogs find calming.

They may not be tolerated in all dogs so it is best to trial the shirt/jacket before a noise event to see how your dog reacts.



Keep Them Safe

- Take your dog out to use the toilet before a noise event starts (e.g. before it gets dark on Firework Night).
- If you have to take your dog out to toilet during a noise event it may be safest to use a lead in case they panic and try to run away.
- Ensure all windows and doors are closed in the house and any gates to the garden are shut and locked.

Muffle External Sounds

- Close curtains, windows and doors.
- If you normally have the radio on, listen to music or watch TV, this noise can be used to mask outside sounds. If your dog is not used to these noises or you don't normally play them it is best not to have them on as they can become a predictor for scary outside sounds for your dog.

Be Aware of the Approaching Events

- Be aware of fixed events like Firework Night or New Year's Eve.
- Check if there are thunderstorms forecast.



How can I help my dog during a noise event?

Encourage Them to Use Their Hiding Place

- Provide them food and water in their hiding place so they do not have to leave it unless they want to.
- Do not ask them to leave if they don't want to.

Keep Calm

- Dogs often look to their owners for guidance for how to react to things, so it is important to show them that you are not worried.
- Do not get cross or frustrated with your dog.
- Do not ignore your dog if they approach you.
- Calmly stroke them if they come to you for reassurance.
- Avoid excessively stroking/kissing around their face or hugging them tightly as this can be interpreted as a sign that you are worried.

Give Them Something Calming To Do

- Licking and chewing are soothing behaviours for dogs. Providing things like lick mats, snuffle mats or toys to chew can help them drain off their anxiety.
- Playing with your dog can distract them from noises. If your dog doesn't want to play it is best to allow them to hide.





Desensitising Sound Fears

How can I improve my dog's fear of sounds?

By playing sounds of fireworks/thunder at home, you can build your dog's confidence through desensitisation and counter-conditioning. Desensitisation and counter-conditioning are both slow processes that take time (weeks to months). They should be started after an expected noise event like Firework night. Your dog should NOT be distressed by the sounds at any point.

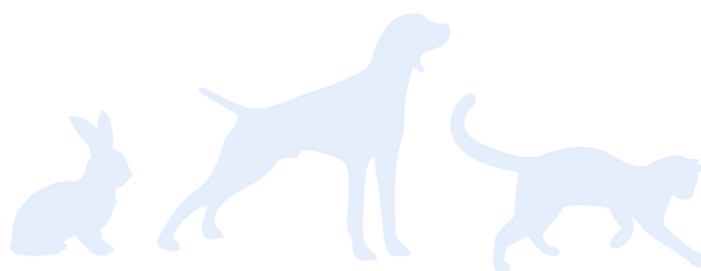
The Dog's Trust website has some sound files of different firework noises that you can use for desensitisation and counter-conditioning: [Stream Dogs Trust - Listen to Sound Therapy - Sounds Scary - Main Tracks](#)

Youtube/Spotify will also have numerous videos/audio files of fireworks to use.

It is best if the sounds are played through a speaker rather than a phone or laptop.

Desensitising

- Choose a room where your dog likes to rest in. Ensure your dog is relaxed before you start and leave the door open so they can leave if they want.
- Set the volume to as low as possible and play the first sound. If your dog doesn't react, increase the volume until you notice your dog twitch or flick their ears in response to the noise. If your dog reacts any more than this, reduce the volume. If your dog still reacts on the lowest volume, stop the sounds and speak to us for advice.
- Once you have found the right volume, play these sounds for 5-10 minutes 3-4 times a day. Once your dog stops reacting at all to the noise, increase the volume slightly until you see signs of recognition (moving their ears) and repeat the process.
- Over a period of time – weeks to months – your dog will not react even when the volume is moderately high.
- If at any point your dog shows signs of fear, stop the sounds immediately and set the volume lower for the next session.





Desensitising Sound Fears...(continued)

Counter-conditioning

- Counter-conditioning should only be attempted once your dog is comfortable with the sounds being played at a moderate volume.
- If your dog is food motivated, use food for this step. If they prefer toys/playing then use their favourite toy.
- Play the sounds at a volume you know they are comfortable with. As soon as your dog hears them give them some treats or start playing with them. As soon as your dog finishes eating or playing stop the sounds immediately.
- Repeat this exercise daily until your dog looks excited when the sounds start.
- Increase the volume slowly as you did for desensitisation.
- Eventually your dog should associate the sounds with feeding or playing and associate a positive response to it. This will allow you to feed treats or play with your dog during real fireworks or thunder.

What if my dog is still frightened?

Medication

Prescription medication can be invaluable for dogs that are affected by noise events. There are a number of different medications that can help your dog's specific circumstances. Please speak to us if you think your dog may benefit from medication.

Accredited Behaviourist

While we do not have a certified behaviourist on staff, our vets are experienced in managing a wide range of behavioural concerns and can often provide support in-house.

If your pet is struggling with sound-related fears such as fireworks – you can book a consultation with our experienced team to create a personalised, long-term strategy that helps your pet feel safe and confident.

If you have other concerns, or your pet is fearful of multiple types of sounds, we recommend completing our Pet Behaviour Questionnaire, and we may advise seeking help from a certified behaviourist.

To find out more about the help we offer, visit: [Ash Tree Vets – Pet Behaviour](#) or get in touch with our friendly team on **01858 462 839**



What About Cats?

Recognising Signs of Fear or Anxiety

- Hiding or trying to escape
- Destructive behaviour
- Inappropriate toileting
- Overgrooming
- Trembling or excessive vocalisation
- Clinginess or restlessness

How to Help

- **Create a Safe Space** – set up a quiet, cosy area where your cat can retreat. Use a covered bed, cardboard box, or a blanket-draped chair in a quiet room. Let your cat choose where they feel safest – don't force them to stay in one spot.
- **High-Up Hiding Spots** – cats often feel safer when elevated. Provide access to shelves, wardrobes, or cat trees. Add blankets and treats to make these spots more inviting.
- **Use Calming Pheromones** – these products mimic natural feline pheromones and help reduce anxiety. Use plug-in diffusers or sprays in your cat's favourite areas or safe space.
- **Reduce Noise & Light** – close windows, curtains, and blinds to muffle sounds and block flashing lights. Play soft music or white noise to mask external sounds.
- **Stick to Routine** – cats thrive on predictability. Feed them at the usual time and keep interactions calm. Avoid sudden changes in environment or behaviour.
- **Keep Cats Indoors** – during noise events if they tolerate it. Ensure all windows and external doors are securely shut to prevent escape.
- **Offer Distractions** – if your cat is receptive, use puzzle feeders or toys. Some cats may prefer solitude.
- **Behavioural Therapy** – for ongoing or severe sound phobias, a behavioural consult may be beneficial. Techniques like desensitisation and counter-conditioning can be tailored to your cat's needs.
- **Ensure Microchip Details Are Up to Date** – in case your cat escapes in panic.





Other Pets and Sound Fear

It's not just dogs and cats that can suffer from sound-related anxiety. Small furries – like rabbits, guinea pigs, and other small mammals – can be especially sensitive to loud noises such as fireworks and thunderstorms.

How to Help Small Furries

- Bring Outdoor Pets Indoors
- If possible, move hutches or cages inside during noise events to reduce exposure to sudden sounds and flashing lights.
- Cover Their Hutch or Cage – use a blanket to help muffle noise, but make sure there's adequate ventilation to keep them safe and comfortable.
- Provide Extra Bedding – deep layers of hay or soft bedding allow them to burrow and feel secure.
- Keep the Environment Calm – avoid loud music, shouting, or sudden movements. A quiet, dimly lit room can help them feel more at ease.

General Tips for All Pets

- Set Up Multiple Hiding Places – if you have more than one pet, ensure each has access to a safe space to retreat.
- Avoid Punishing Fearful Behaviour – fear is a natural response. Punishment can increase anxiety and worsen the problem.
- Consider Calming Supplements or Diets – ask our team for advice on safe, vet-recommended options to help reduce stress.
- Stay Home if Your Pet Is Very Anxious – your presence can be reassuring. Avoid leaving highly anxious pets alone during fireworks or storms.

We offer personalised, long-term strategies for dogs and cats' sound-related fears.

Our experienced team is here to help your pet feel safe and confident.

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