

Thunderstorm and Firework Phobias

Do thunderstorms and 4th of July fireworks send your dog into a panic? Dogs may be genetically programmed to react to loud noises, but environmental factors and learned behaviors also play a role. Noise-induced anxiety can range from mild tension or drooling, to anxiety that is so extreme that your pet may even jump through a window or screen door to escape.

If your dog is frightened by thunder and fireworks, try the following:

Set up a safe haven in the house.

Set up a crate or other comfortable, snug space in a basement or closet that buffers outside noises. Practice going into the safe place, and give your dog a favorite treat or toy as a reward. Softly play recordings of storms or fireworks while your dog is in the safe place to help your pet become used to the sounds during positive activities. Take your dog to the safe place during a actual thunderstorm or fireworks show and play music to disguise the outside noises.

Turn to special products for help

Many dog owners report success using products designed to reduce phobias. Mutt Muffs® (www.safeandsoundpets.com) are noise-blocking earmuffs that come in a variety of sizes. Many dogs will also feel calmer in a snug wrap called a Thunder Shirt® (www.thundershirt.com), which works similarly to swaddling for babies. There is even Dog Appeasing Pheromone (DAP) (www.dogappeasingpheromone.com), widely available on the Internet as a spray, diffuser or collar. The scent reduces anxiety in dogs and can be used to make the safe haven more relaxing and inviting.

Get professional help

Untreated canine anxiety typically escalates with each exposure to the fear-causing stimulus. If you have a very anxious or panic-prone dog, do not hesitate to seek advice from a veterinarian. If needed, your veterinarian can prescribe a short-acting anti-anxiety drug that will give tremendous relief to your dog if taken prior to fireworks shows or thunderstorms. If your dog has generalized anxiety and is panic-stricken during storms, talk to your veterinarian about drugs to help control anxiety at all times.

For more information, please see the page on fearful behaviors in the pet care handout section of our website.