

FEAR OF LOUD NOISES

Some dogs are terrorized by loud noises. This terror is usually learned from a traumatic experience which occurred at the same time as the noise. It can also be learned by transfer. For example, if you showed fear of a loud noise one time, your dog would learn that loud noises are to be feared. A dog's ears are sensitive, and loud noises can hurt them.

Whatever the reason, try to shield your dog from loud noises. Keeping him in the house on New Year's Eve or the Fourth of July is very wise. If your dog is already afraid of loud noises, then a process of desensitization will help.

To desensitize your dog, expose him to low-volume noises while giving him something pleasurable such as praise and a food treat. Gradually increase the noise level, praising his tolerance, until the fear no longer manifests itself.

If your dog is afraid of thunder, firecrackers, or gunshot, get a recording of these sounds. Play the recording at a low volume barely audible but high enough to be heard and not frighten him. At the same time praise and reward him with his favorite food treat while the recording is playing. In the beginning, introduce the recording for a short period of time several times a day. Increase the time interval each day and slightly raise the volume. Continue to offer large measures of love and reassurance, praise, and food treats as the recording is playing. If you get an adverse reaction, you may have increased the volume too much too soon. This should be done about three or four times a day for a week or two or until you feel that your dog can tolerate the noise at a loudness that simulates it in reality.

If your dog does not respond to desensitization, it may be wise to get a tranquilizer from your veterinarian and administer it just before certain holidays, the hunting season, or a predicted thunder storm. It is not easy to anticipate when a loud noise will occur. For example, the backfiring of a car may send your dog under the bed for a few hours. The best you can do if you are with your dog when a loud noise frightens him, is to act happy and unconcerned. If your dog suspects you are frightened also, he will react accordingly.

Finally, provide a safe place for your dog to retreat when the noise is heard.