

Noise Anxiety

Desensitizing Your Dog to Loud Noises



The thunder rolls and lightning flashes, and you look around for best friend. After a few minutes of searching, you find your dog cowering under the kitchen table, his tremors more and more pronounced as the thunder gets louder. Minutes are spent fruitlessly trying to coax him out, and in the end you give up. Is this a familiar scenario? You are not alone (and neither is your dog).

Thousands of dogs around the world have this same problem, and it is not as hopeless as it seem. Severe noise anxiety can be reduced by constant exposure in a desensitization process. It's time to tackle this problem head on, so that you and your dog can relax and breathe easy the next time a thunderstorm blows in.

The first step is observation. Is it just thunder that causes your buddy to shake and shiver? Or is it other noises as well? Noises such as the engine rumble of a transport going by, a gunshot, thunder and loud bangs or deep voices are all common causes of noise anxiety. Identify which one bothers your dog the most.

The next step is to set about an association reaction. Hear the thunder coming? Before the tremors set in, haul out the dog treats. Before your dog gets to the cowering point, hand out a treat for every second he does NOT try to run. If he stays in a "sit" reward him. Sometimes owners unwittingly reward the fear reaction, encouraging their dog to BE fearful.

Set up a tape recorder, and record the worst of the thunder noises (or other noises that cause the fear). Pick a day when you can put up with it, and playback the recordings, starting on a low volume setting, and get louder gradually. As the noise continues, your dog will experience a less intense reaction. **I should emphasize that you increase the volume GRADUALLY.**

Sometimes this process could take a while, but when your dog is able to sit calmly next to you when it's stormy out, you'll know you've won.

