



Loud noise, panic attacks (Noise phobia)

Fear of loud noises, e.g. thunderstorms, fireworks, is a relatively common problem with dogs. It is more common in herding breeds e.g. Border Collie, Shetland Sheepdogs, German Shepherd Dogs, and their crossbreeds but can happen in any breed.

Sometimes a triggering experience can be pinpointed, but not always. The phobias can start before the dog is even 1 year old and can increase in severity as the dog ages.

Dogs vary in how they show noise phobia. Your dog may only appear a little restless or may show panting, trembling, pacing, barking, frantic escaping, loss of bladder and/or bowel control and destruction of property.

Prevention is always easier than trying to cure a long established phobia, so taking precautionary steps with young dogs on their first Bonfire night or thunderstorms in April seems a good idea.

1. A tired dog can often be more relaxed, so go for a good long walk in the afternoon on November 5th or before a bad thunderstorm is predicted.
2. **KEEP CALM YOURSELF.** Dogs are exceptionally good at reading body language and if you are worried your dog will be also. Don't reassure your dog, as this makes him focus on how worried he is feeling.
3. Never leave your dog alone on Bonfire night, especially if it the first one. Try to keep the excitement of children and visitors to a minimum until they have left the house, as your dog will be more excited and therefore more easily roused into a panic attack.
4. Put your dog's bed, food and water into a room that is central in the house with ideally no windows to the outside e.g. the hallway or landing. This helps to reduce the noise level for your pet. You can leave a door open to wherever you are, so that your dog knows where you are. If windows cannot be avoided remember to draw the curtains. Background noise in the form of TV or music can also help drown out the scary noises.
5. Use distraction if your dog is starting to be a bit nervous. Do some basic obedience training, play a game, hunt for treats or anything else that will concentrate your dog's mind on you and not on the noises from outside.
6. **ALWAYS BEHAVE CONFIDENTLY AS IF THERE WAS NO PROBLEM.**

If all goes well you will hopefully have a laid back pet that never goes onto develop noise phobias. This unfortunately is not always the case and the earlier remedial treatment is given the more chance of success you have. A trip to an animal psychologist is usually cheaper than a new carpet or back door! In the past ACP tablets were given to dogs with noise phobia as it sedates the dog, so that is unable to react to noises. This treatment however does nothing to reduce the anxiety of the dog so the next year the dog remembers being anxious, feeling awful and not being able to do anything about it, which in turn makes the phobia worse. In addition it is not good for your dog's health to have this more then very occasionally. Other treatments included herbal remedies e.g. Skullcap and Valerian tablets, with a variable degree of success. A more modern approach is to use drugs that will reduce anxiety coupled with a desensitisation programme, which will increase the tolerance of your pet to its particular fear provoking noise. This does need some effort on the part of you the owner, but it surely must be worth it if it might cure this perennial problem.