

eileenanddogs

What my dogs teach me.

6 Ways to Prepare Your Dog for Fireworks Starting TODAY



Updated for 2018.

Oh no. Here come Canada Day and the U.S. Independence Day. Noisy holidays are rolling around again. Is your dog scared of fireworks?

Even though it's just a few days before the holiday, you can make a plan and take action to help your dog be less afraid of the unpredictable scary sounds of fireworks, firecrackers, whistles, and even guns.

Get Ready

Here are some things you can do *today*.

1. Countercondition to Noises

Get some great treats and start carrying them around. Whenever there is any kind of sudden or startling noise, but especially stray bangs and booms as people start to test their noisemakers, rain treats down on your dog. Use those special treats *only* for noises. Don't pass them out for nice behavior (use something else for that!), and don't ask for any particular behavior from your dog when the noise occurs. Just give the special treats.

You may wonder why I am not recommending buying an app or CD with fireworks sounds to "practice" with. Performing [desensitization/counterconditioning](#) with sounds is tricky. People who haven't done DS/CC before run a real risk of scaring their dogs further instead of helping them. This is why I am suggesting this method,

which uses environmental noises that are happening anyway.

2. Create a Safe Place

Make (or adapt) a [safe place for your dog](#). Keep in mind that the flashes of light that come with big fireworks displays can be scary too. Consider a method to darken any windows nearby or shield the safe place with a cover if necessary. Be aware that the [low frequency sounds of thunder are physically impossible to mute with the amount of absorbent material such as blankets or foam we can use at home](#). But being underground can help a bit, so basements are a good option for some dogs.

3. Play Sound or Music

Experiment with [sound masking](#) and/or music to find out what is the most helpful for your situation. There are two contrasting methods here. Some people find that slow, quiet classical or easy listening music is soothing to their dogs. If you have already found that to be so, use it, but don't try it out for the first time when the fireworks are going on. It does not work for all dogs, and you might even get "reverse conditioning" and make playing music scary to your dogs if it predicts fireworks.

The other method is to use some kind of louder music your dogs are already used to in order to mask the pops and booms. Recorded white noise and fans can work well too. This "mechanical" approach is more to my liking. It is supported by physics. And here's a tip: the lower the frequencies included in the masking or music, the better it can hide those low-pitched booms (Kinsler, Frey, Coppens, & Sanders, 1999, p.318–320). Some freestanding fans actually cover some impressively low frequencies. They are a nice addition if your dogs are already accustomed to them. And if your dogs are already habituated to pounding rock music or some other music with a lot of bass or percussion, *play it*, and use your best sound system! It can mask some of the scary noises from outside your house more effectively. I have a [taiko drumming CD](#) that is great for this. But if you try that, first be certain that the music itself or the particular sound system you use doesn't scare your dogs. If they are already sensitive to booms and haven't heard such music before, it's risky. You'll need to find the line of best fit for your dogs.

One more possibility: consider any normal household noises that can help mask the sound. Do any of your dogs like noisy food toys that get knocked around? How about the washer and dryer? One possibility is to put a pair of sports shoes into the dryer and turn it on (no heat). I read this idea on Facebook and don't remember whom to credit but it's brilliant. Again, only if the booming dryer itself won't scare your dog.

4. Practice Going Out

Make a plan for taking your dog out to potty. Practice. Do you know when the noise is usually at its worst and can you work around that? Are your fences and/or leash and harness secure? Otherwise sedate dogs have been known to panic and run off on noisy holidays. Don't let that happen. Keep your gates locked, your dogs' collar or harness and ID tags on, and put some redundancy into your safety system.

5. Comfort Your Dog if That Helps

LOSE that idea that you should make your dog "tough it out." There is nothing to be gained from that. In fact, it's fine to comfort your dog if that helps her. [You can't reinforce the emotion of fear](#), and helping a dog through a tough time is not "coddling." (It's possible to reinforce *behaviors* associated with fear, but that is a subject for another post. If a dog is really scared, it's a non-issue.) Assess what is most helpful to your dog: a cuddle, some lap time, a ride in the car, being in her crate with a food toy, or hiding by herself [in a secluded place](#). Then help

her do it.

6. Check Into Medications

If your dog's fears are severe, talk to your vet about medication. You can [download and fill out this sound sensitivity checklist](#) to take to your vet. There are short-term, situational medications that can help your dog relax. ([NOT Acepromazine.](#)) Ask your vet if you should have a trial run of short-term meds on a "normal" day. Your vet may also discuss some longer-term medications.



The best part of noisy holidays: spray cheese!

Check out more resources and tips on my page "[You Can't Reinforce Fear.](#)"

Thanks for reading! I hope you can help your dog feel as safe as possible. If you are new to my blog, please go to the right sidebar and subscribe to get email notifications when I publish something new.

Reference

Kinsler, L. E., Frey, A. R., Coppens, A. B., & Sanders, J. V. (1999). *Fundamentals of Acoustics* (4th ed.). Wiley.

[Eileenanddogs on YouTube](#)

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Credit for the fireworks photo: [Wikimedia Commons](#)

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23 Responses to 6 Ways to Prepare Your Dog for Fireworks Starting TODAY

Pingback: [Fireworks Time! | Courteous Canine](#)



Natasha says:

July 4, 2015 at 11:35 am

I bought a well-known series of CDs and started with the thunder sounds. No. The “mildest” segment started with some slow Chopin piano, single notes with long drawn-out pauses, and Boom, rumble rumble. Not faint at all! My doggie ran around the house in a panic, trying to see where the storm was, panting, etc. Useless! Put on Beatles music and dance during the fireworks if anything. She now runs to me when I say “boom boom, yay!” and give her cheese.

[Reply](#)



Eileen Anderson says:

July 4, 2015 at 1:42 pm

Yes, that is a real hazard with sound CDs. So sorry that happened! Sounds like you have a good system now. Thanks for the comment.

[Reply](#)



Peggy McCallum says:

July 5, 2015 at 10:59 am

Brilliant, Eileen! I have been leaving a link to this all over Facebook! Lots of Airedales have sound issues. And thanks for the Taiko suggestion! Got one in iTunes and it worked great for Reggie. Started it soft half an hour before the show, turned it up gradually and we were in business. I think it helped that we have used a thunder CD to mask thunder (we spent literally weeks if not months playing that thunder tape ALL EVENING while we watched TV and whatever.) It was coincidence that we found it masked the thunder.

[Reply](#)



Eileen Anderson says:

July 5, 2015 at 11:27 am

Peggy! Masking thunder with a thunder CD! Of course! Why didn't I think of that? It might interest you to know that dogs can't hear as far down into the low frequencies as we do. (Dogs can hear much higher than we can, which is more widely known.) So the average home sound system can cover their bottom range. It takes low frequencies to mask low frequencies, so a recording could definitely mask thunder that isn't too close. Once it gets close, no sound system could mask it and you wouldn't want to try. Anyway, thanks so much for sharing this. I'm going to update some articles!

[Reply](#)

Pingback: [Help my dog be OK with fireworks](#)

Pingback: [Getting Ready for Fireworks and Scary Noises - eileenanddogseileenanddogs](#)

Pingback: [Fireworks and dogs – the definitive guide to prevent, reduce and eliminate fear – Illis ABC](#)



EllenC says:

June 27, 2016 at 11:02 pm

While it's a big hassle, leaving town was by far the most effective thing. We fled to the Sierra Nevada Foothills and it was very nice.

[Reply](#)



Eileen Anderson says:

June 28, 2016 at 7:51 pm

How lovely! (I'm from the Central Valley.) I'm sure your dog/s approved!

[Reply](#)



HarrietA says:

June 29, 2016 at 2:38 pm

My two wheaten terriers run around barking and sounding like they're going into attack mode, as opposed to running and hiding in fear. Is this just another side to showing fear? This can happen with any loud noise, not just fireworks or thunder.

[Reply](#)



Eileen Anderson says:

June 30, 2016 at 10:20 am

We can't say over the internet what a dog's motivations are, but barking can be from excitement but also most definitely from fear. Like the dog is saying, "Stop it, go away, go away!" Some trainers point out that when dogs attack from fear they actually are achieving the same thing as running away: attempting to "take out" the threat. You might check out the [CARE protocol](#), Harriet. It has information on how to help dogs who are reacting either from excitement or fear, and some information on telling the difference. Good luck!

[Reply](#)

Pingback: [Fireworks Time! - eileenanddogseileenanddogs](#)



Barb Sahl says:

June 29, 2017 at 9:18 am

Thanks for this post Eileen. I've shared it! Your note on fireworks CDs is interesting. I've always been skeptical of a CD being able to reproduce the entire fireworks experience. But I tried it any way. Last year my puppy was six months old on the 4th. That April I started playing a CD and followed the typical progression with it and increased the volume a bit everyday. She was a rock star with fireworks last year. I didn't even think to do it again and this year she is trembling and clinging. I have no idea if her acceptance last year was related to her puppy-ness or the CD or what, but it's a totally different reaction this year. Lots of chicken this year....

[Reply](#)



Eileen Anderson says:

June 29, 2017 at 9:55 am

I think when they are that young, just exposing them to different sounds with good associations, or at least without bad ones, can be a good thing. And truly, a couple of studies have shown that recorded sounds helped a little bit, but that was with a combination of approaches I think. Anyway—most people's speakers can't generate the booming low frequencies in a convincing way. So while it might be a good way to start out (under threshold), you can never duplicate the "entire fireworks experience" as you so aptly called it.

I'm so sorry your pup is having a hard time this year. Sound sensitivity at that age—maybe a vet visit is in order?

Thanks for sharing the post!

[Reply](#)



Kathleen Dawkins says:

June 29, 2017 at 4:41 pm

We have the NY ceremonies and fireworks on while the neighborhood ones are going and turn it up loud and she just assumes it's on TV as well as outside I guess and doesn't pay any attention just lays down and ignores all of it. and when the dog isn't scared the cats aren't either. guess they assumed that if the dogs fine and not scared they are too. it has worked great the last 3 years. Before that they were always looking for a place to hide and very nervous wondering around the house looking for that place and looking at us with those fearful eyes and wondering why we weren't doing something about it.

[Reply](#)



Eileen Anderson says:

June 29, 2017 at 7:18 pm

That's a great idea! It underscores that they can tell the difference between the two (recordings and local/live), but still the ones inside the house can mask some of what's outside. Thanks for sharing that!

[Reply](#)



Pat says:

July 2, 2017 at 11:00 pm

My dog and I would hang out in a dark closet or the bath tub...I could hold her the whole time!

[Reply](#)



Eileen Anderson says:

July 3, 2017 at 4:02 pm

Awww! Good for you!

[Reply](#)



usillyrabbitt says:

May 19, 2018 at 4:37 pm

I decided to try firework sounds piped through my TV with loud bass speaker attached. Nothing. No reaction. I'm surprised, as in the past when I tried gunshots on the TV, my one nervous dog reacted. Unfortunately, where I live now I doubt anything will keep my dogs from freaking out during the 4th since people here seem to take great joy in setting of m60s or larger right outside our house. Those scare me! Our windows rattle and the flash of light is really scary. Truly looks like a bomb is going off (which I guess it is, just a small one.)

Even my very stable dog, who walked through a procession in Mexico with drums and fireworks going off around us, gets scared by the explosions by our home. Not much we can do but leave, I guess.

[Reply](#)



Eileen Anderson says:

May 28, 2018 at 8:00 pm

Oh man, that's rough. Thanks for the info about your good speakers, but I'm sure sorry it didn't help.

If their reactions are severe enough and/or longlasting enough, you might talk to your vet. There are some new situational meds specifically for that.

I do know one person who loads up her dogs in the car and drives for much of the evening. That has some down sides as well, though. Take care. Sorry about the M60s. Gosh!

[Reply](#)

Pingback: [Preparing Your Old Dog for Fireworks and Other Scary Noises | Dog Dementia Help and Support](#)

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