



Peninsula Humane Society & SPCA

# Overcoming a Fear of Loud Noises

**It is normal for some animals to be frightened by loud or sudden noises, such as thunderstorms, fireworks, vacuum cleaners, and loud trucks. They can express fear by barking, cowering, running away, or being destructive.**

**We, as pet owners, often make mistakes which make the situation worse. First, never reprimand or punish the animal for being afraid. Second, never verbally or physically try to reassure or comfort your pet when she is acting fearful. If you stroke, cradle, or hug your pet while offering soothing words, your pet won't understand the meaning of your words; she'll think she is receiving a reward. The pet usually concludes she's doing the right thing by acting nervous.**

## **Treatment**

Until your pet is over her fears, it is best to confine her to a place where she can't hurt herself or destroy your property. Accustom your pet to her special place so that she feels comfortable and secure there. Don't wait until the storm has arrived before introducing your pet to her safe haven. For a dog, a crate is an ideal safe haven. See our "Cratetraining" handout for more information about desensitizing a dog to a crate.

It can be very helpful to teach your pet a few tricks and games. It's difficult for a dog or cat to be frightened when she's enjoying a favorite game of fetch or chase. It can also help your dog to brush up

on obedience training. It's difficult for a dog to think about the storm outside when she's concentrating on a quick series of commands she's learned. Once you distract your pet from the noise, you can then shower her with attention for obeying a simple command instead of for acting fearful. The key is patience and practice. Don't wait until July 3rd or the night before a thunderstorm to begin teaching your dog a few tricks. Be sure she knows them well beforehand. She will probably have trouble concentrating at first, so the better she knows the tricks, the easier it will be for her to perform them under pressure.

Another method of helping your pet overcome her fear is to accustom her, slowly and gradually, to the noises that frighten her. You can make a recording of the sounds and play it back while she is enjoying everyday activities. Some record stores have soundtracks of thunderstorms and rain that you can purchase. First, play it at such a low volume that you can barely hear it. Your pet should show no signs of fear at this volume. Gradually, over weeks or months, increase the volume by tiny increments. The volume should be increased so slowly that she hardly notices the change. Eventually your pet will be used to hearing sounds at full force. If at any time she shows signs of fear, decrease the volume and proceed a little more slowly. This procedure will work more quickly if you combine it with the distraction training described above.

**For more info, call our free Behavior Helpline (650/340-7022 x783 or, for Spanish, x786) or consider a low-cost consultation. To make a consultation appointment, call 650/340-7022 x667. The PHS/SPCA Behavior Department, like many shelter programs, is funded by donations.**