

# Sounds Scary!



## Therapy for your dog's fear of fireworks

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## Introduction

Thank you for using Sounds Scary.

Sounds Scary was developed by Jon Bowen and Sarah Heath, who are internationally renowned veterinary experts in animal behaviour.

Having successfully used behavioural therapy to successfully help their noise-phobic patients, Jon and Sarah decided to make a product that would enable dog owners to help their own pets using the same professional techniques.

Since 2001, when Sounds Scary was launched in the UK, it has been used by many thousands of dog owners. It has become the first-choice product of vets and professional dog behaviourists internationally.

Sounds Scary has been independently scientifically tested and translated into 10 languages.

Now, for the first time, Sounds Scary is available free through the Dogs Trust.

## The sounds

This product has four tracks for treating firework fear, which are labelled:

Track 1 Whistles and whooshes

Track 2 Bangs and pops

Track 3 Full fireworks

Track 4 Individual firework sounds

If you play one of the first three tracks, you will notice that there is a period of about five seconds of silence at the beginning, followed by a gradual increase in sound volume.

This is to allow you the chance to turn the volume down if you have accidentally set it too high during therapy. It also lets you move away from the sound system so that your dog does not anticipate the start of the sounds.

Each of the first three tracks is about 15 minutes long, and the fourth is about 12 minutes long.

There are also a set of supplementary recordings of thunder, rain, hail and gunfire that you can use in the same way as the firework tracks.

**Please read the rest of this manual and follow the instructions carefully.**

## Setting up your sound system

Get someone to take your dog out for a walk while you set up your sound system because you will need to test the sounds at a level that might frighten your dog.

Position the speakers far apart, preferably on either side of a window or outward facing door. This makes it sound like the noises are coming from outside, adding to the realism

Keeping the volume at a moderate level, play the sounds and adjust the bass and treble controls on your sound system so that the sounds are as realistic as possible. Switch off any ambience settings on your sound system (these may have names such as “hall”, “church” or “jazz”).

Each time you play the sounds, you will need to check the sound level before you press play. On some sound systems there is a digital readout with a number that indicates loudness. If your system does not have this, there will be a volume knob or slider. Stick a piece of tape next to this, so that you can write on a mark to show the position and enable you to use the same volume next time you play the sounds.



Please note that the sounds on this recording are very powerful, like any loud music, so be careful not to turn the volume up too high or you may damage your speakers

## Where to do therapy

Choose a room where your dog feels safe and spends a lot of time relaxed and resting.

Leave the door open so that if your dog becomes distressed by the noises then he or she can leave.

You can do all of your desensitisation and counterconditioning in this place to start with, but once you are finished you should then do some more counterconditioning in two other places so that your dog becomes convinced that the noises are not a threat wherever they happen (see later for more details).



## Choosing the sounds to play

Look through the track listing to see which sounds your dog is frightened of. These are the sounds you will use for therapy.

Some dogs are more afraid of the banging sounds of fireworks than the whistles and whooshes, or vice versa.

We deliberately separated these types of noises into individual tracks because some dogs react so badly to the combination of whistles, whooshes, bangs and pops that it is very hard to set the playback level correctly.

*It is best to work with the sounds your dog is least afraid of first.*

In general, it is best work through the firework tracks in order. This will make therapy faster and easier.

However, if you are confident that your dog does not react to whooshes and whistles then you can skip therapy with track 1.

## Assessment

Some dogs are more fearful of loud noises than others.

Answer yes or no to each of the following questions:

- Does your dog show intense fear even with very distant or quiet firework noises?
- Does it take your dog several hours to recover after being frightened by a noise, perhaps not being fully back to normal until the following day?
- Does your dog react fearfully to a very wide range of noises, not just fireworks, thunder and gunshots?

If the answer is yes to all three of the above questions then your dog is likely to have quite a severe problem that may take a long time to treat and require more specialist help. You should talk to your veterinary surgeon for further advice.

If, when you start therapy, you find that your dog reacts fearfully even when the sounds are played back at the very lowest volume, then your dog is too sound sensitive to use this product and you need to seek further advice.

## Speeding up therapy

Every dog is different, and the length of therapy varies between individuals. In an independent study, more than 90% of dogs treated with Sounds Scary showed a significant improvement after 8 weeks. However, some dogs will take much longer.

One way to speed up the response to therapy is to use an Adaptil<sup>®</sup> diffuser.

Adaptil<sup>®</sup> is often used to help dogs to get through real firework events, because it reduces anxiety and fearfulness. This same effect also helps when you are using Sounds Scary.

Install a diffuser in the room where you are carrying out therapy, as close as possible to the place where your dog rests during the training. Leave it switched on at all times and do not move it around.

Adaptil<sup>®</sup> diffusers are available from your veterinary clinic, and through good online stores.



## **When to do therapy**

If you are expecting fireworks to start within a few days of getting this product, then you should focus on enabling your dog to get through the event, and only start therapy after it is over.

Don't do training when your dog is frightened or anxious, or when you expect real noises outside that may cause your dog to become afraid.

It is also best to avoid times when your dog is very excited, such as after a visitor has arrived or before going on a walk.

The best time to do therapy is when your dog is already calm and relaxed, but not asleep.

## Making a refuge

Some dogs become very distressed and destructive during loud noise events, especially when they are left alone. Dogs really benefit from having a refuge where they can go to get away from the worst of the sounds.

The refuge should be available to your dog at all times, whether you are at home or not.

- Choose a place where your dog has already shown a tendency to hide.
- Usually it is best to pick a room with small windows or in the centre of the house where sound levels are lowest.
- Darken the room by keeping windows and curtains shut.
- Install a pile of bedding and old clothes for your dog to dig into and hide under.
- Play familiar music, with the speakers positioned on a windowsill to mask nasty noises coming from outside. Rhythmic music is best, but only if your dog is comfortable with it.
- Provide food and plenty of water.
- Install an Adaptil® diffuser in the hiding place near to where your dog rests. It is best to install this 14 days before a known firework event. The diffuser should be left switched on at all times.
- Regularly hide food treats and chews in the refuge to encourage your dog to go there.

## Starting therapy

Each of the first three tracks starts with 5 seconds of silence and then the sounds gradually get louder.

The first time you play the sounds you need to be very careful to monitor your dog's reaction.

Set the track volume as low as you can and allow one of the tracks to play for 20-30 seconds.

If your dog shows no reaction, turn up the volume little by little until you can see that your dog has noticed the sounds but is not afraid. Your dog's ears will twitch a few times and your dog will then settle down again. If your dog raises its head then the sound is too loud. Remember that your dog may find the sound too loud even before you are able to hear the sound yourself.

If your dog is afraid with the noises at their lowest level, then try switching one speaker off, turning the bass down or even muffling the speakers with a cushion.

If your dog is still frightened then you should contact your veterinary surgeon for additional help.

## Therapy

Therapy is divided into three steps:

- Desensitisation
- Counter-conditioning (Part 1)
- Counter-conditioning (Part 2)

To be safe and effective, these steps need to be carried out in order.

Desensitisation is the slowest step to complete, taking several weeks of daily sessions to finish. At the end of desensitisation, your dog's reaction to the noises you have worked with will be reduced.

Counter-conditioning (Part 1) is a faster process, and helps to ensure that your dog is less likely to relapse in the future. It involves associating the noises your dog used be afraid of with something nice like food.

The last step, counter-conditioning (Part 2), teaches your dog to look to you for guidance, so that if your dog does feel afraid then he/she will respond when you act happy and show that you are not afraid.

## **Desensitisation**

The first step in therapy is to neutralise your dog's reaction to the sounds. Once this is complete your dog will show a neutral reaction to sounds played at a level that would previously have produced feelings of fear.

1. Set the Hi-Fi volume to zero.
2. Press play, and wait for 15 seconds.
3. Slowly increase the volume until you see the first signs of recognition that there is a noise, such as a slight movement or twitch of your dog's ears. Do not turn the volume up loud enough to cause fear, anxiety or agitation.
4. Once you have found this starting level, make a note of the volume setting so that you can reliably return to that volume when you repeat the exercise.
5. Play the sounds at this starting level for 5-10 minutes, 3-4 times each day.
6. Once your dog shows no reaction at all to the sounds played at this level, you can increase the volume slightly until you see signs of recognition again (a twitch of the ears)
7. Repeat steps 5 and 6, gradually increasing the sound volume and playing the sounds repeatedly until your dog shows no reaction.
8. Over a period of weeks you will reach the stage where your dog will not react to the sound stimuli even when set at moderate to full volume. Every dog is different and this may take several weeks.

If at any point in desensitisation your dog reacts fearfully to the sound, you must act in a happy and relaxed manner so that your dog can see that there is nothing to worry

about. Resist the temptation to go to your dog to reassure it as this may be misinterpreted as you being worried and increase negative perceptions of the sounds. Stop the session immediately and set the volume lower for the next long session because you have tried to progress too quickly.

Desensitise each of the first three tracks before beginning counter-conditioning with it.

### **Counter-conditioning (Part 1)**

In this stage of therapy we want to teach your dog to associate the noises you are playing with a pleasant experience. At the end of this stage your dog will become excited and happy when you play the sounds even at a loud level.

1. Get the sounds ready to play one of the long tracks, set at the starting volume you originally tested. Use the pause button to hold the sounds ready to play.
2. Prepare your dog's meal or get a toy ready for a game. Your dog will appear excited but don't start the game or give the food. Instead, sit down to do something calm, like reading, for a few minutes.
3. Your dog will probably be confused! Once your dog has calmed down press play, without letting your dog see what you have done (it is best to use a remote control if possible).
4. As soon as you hear the noises put the food down for your dog, or start to play the game. Leave the sounds playing, but remember that if your dog reacts fearfully to the noise you must stop the sounds immediately and adjust the volume before trying again.

5. As soon as your dog finishes eating or you stop the game, you must stop the sounds.
6. Repeat this exercise daily until your dog looks excited when the noises start.
7. Once you are confident that your dog has accepted the lowest level of sound and is happy when the sounds are playing, then the volume can be increased and the process repeated. Turn the volume up in the same way as you did before.
8. Eventually you should reach the point at which your dog associates the sound with feeding and playing and responds to it with pleasurable anticipation every time he hears the noise.

Once you have finished the desensitisation and counter-conditioning (Part 1) for each of the long tracks you have chosen and your dog is fully acclimatised to them you can move on to Part 2 of counter-conditioning.

### **Counter-conditioning (Part 2)**

In this stage of therapy your dog will learn to react happily to individual loud noises that appear to come 'out of the blue'.

1. Get a pot full of your dog's favourite food treats or your dog's favourite toy.
2. Set the volume back at the starting volume you originally determined.
3. Set the system to play track 4. After about 5 seconds you will hear three bleeps. As soon as you have heard these bleeps, press pause so that your sound system is silent but ready to play.
4. Sit quietly for a few minutes, showing no interest in your dog at all. Wait until your dog is calm.

5. Secretly switch the system to play (it is best to use a remote control if possible). Wait for the first firework sound.
6. Each time you hear a firework sound, start to act happy and excited. Immediately give your dog one of the food treats or start a very brief game (depending on your dog's preference). Then stop and go back to being calm again, ready for the next sound.
7. React the same way each time you hear a sound. Stay calm and relaxed between the noises so that your dog notices that you only become fun and exciting when you hear a sound.
8. After several repetitions of this exercise you can increase the volume carefully only if your dog is happy and relaxed.

Soon you should recognise happy anticipation each time your dog hears the sound.

From now on you should act really excited and give your dog a food treat or play a game whenever you hear a real noise.

## **Getting through scary noise events**

If you have got this product just a couple of weeks before a firework event then you will not have enough time to treat your dog's problems. You may start therapy but your first priority should be to make preparations to help your dog through the fear-inducing event. Make sure that you have constructed a refuge for your dog so that he or she can hide and feel safe while the event is happening.

### **Preparation**

Get your dog used to going to the hiding place 2-3 times each day during the run up to a firework event by taking him/her there and giving him some food or a favourite chew. This will help the dog to understand that this is a good place to go to.

If you know that fireworks are due on a particular evening then give your dog a large stodgy carbohydrate rich meal in the late afternoon on that day. Pasta, mashed potato or overcooked rice are ideal, and will help to make your dog feel calm and sleepy as the night draws in. Discuss this with your vet if your dog has a weak stomach or a history of digestive problems.

Make sure your dog is kept in a safe and secure environment at all times so that he or she cannot bolt and escape if a sudden noise occurs. Keep your dog on a leash in public places and make sure that gates, fences and doors are secure.

Take your dog out to go to the toilet some time before the fireworks noises begin. Draw the curtains and keep windows shut to block sound from outside.

Your vet may provide you with some medication to help your dog through times when he or she is frightened by loud noises, and you should use these in accordance with the instructions supplied.

### **How should you react?**

As soon as the firework noises start, lead your dog to the hiding place and encourage him/her to stay there.

Don't get cross with your dog when he or she is scared, it will cause more fear and stress. Do not react to your dog's fear. Do not try to soothe or calm him/her. Only show attention and affection when your dog has begun to relax.

It is a good idea to try to get your dog in a happy mood before the sounds start, by playing games and doing training using food rewards. Stay playful when the noises start. This will stop him from falling into a state of anxious tension, but don't expect too much.

Be a good role model for your dog. Try to appear happy and unconcerned by the noises. If your dog is only mildly fearful you could try to engage him or her in some form of active game. It can also help if you play a game with another pet in the household, because the frightened one may be tempted to join in.

## **What should I do to prevent future problems?**

*Stay out of trouble.* If you know that your dog is sound-sensitive you should avoid taking your dog anywhere that there may be a level of noise that your dog cannot tolerate.

*Act jolly.* If you do need to go somewhere where loud noise is a possibility, then be prepared. As soon as you see any sign that your dog has heard a scary noise, act jolly and playful as you did during counter-conditioning (part 2). You should be able to distract your dog and then reward him for focusing on you by feeding some of his favorite food treats or playing a game.

*Don't reassure.* If your dog becomes afraid, try to stay as neutral as possible, resisting the temptation to comfort and reassure. Take your dog out of the situation to somewhere quiet and secure, or show him to his hiding place.

*Provide a hiding place.* At home, your dog should always have somewhere to hide during loud noise events.

*Keep playing the sounds.* To maintain your dog's resilience to loud noises, after therapy is complete you should still play the sounds regularly, especially in the period leading up to an expected firework event.

## **Seeking professional help**

Sound phobias are serious and can interfere with your dog's quality of life. They will not get better with time and it is important to start therapy as soon as possible. Your vet should be your first port of call for advice about any aspect of your dog's health, including behaviour. He will be able to give you advice on drug therapy, if it is appropriate, and arrange referral to a pet behaviour counsellor for further advice and support.

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