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GUIDELINES FOR SETTING UP AND USING A BOLTHOLE DURING SCARY EVENTS

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All dogs have a predisposition for developing phobias to loud sudden noises, because of their psychological makeup (they are a prey species), their physical makeup (their hearing abilities), and the environment in which we keep them. They may well perceive the noises more intensely, and earlier than we do. Their natural desire is most probably to flee the scary noise but in modern society we do not allow this. This inability to have an escape may block their ability to cope and trigger the development of a Phobia.

Preparation is vitally important if dogs are to get through fire works or thunderstorms with the minimum of fear and stress. First you need to make a special place where your dogs can go to get away from the sounds he fears. Most dogs will already have a favourite room to go to, in which case all you need to do is modify this place to make it even more suitable as a bolthole. The dog is often choosing this place because

Some dogs do not know where to go to escape and, for these individuals, you need to create somewhere for them to hide. It is best to choose a room that is naturally quiet and those that are located towards the center of the house and have minimal numbers of windows are most suitable.

For those builders out there a small concrete floored brick cupboard with a solid heavy roof is often a great start. Then if a self closing solid door that blacks out the light will make this an ideal bolt hole for most dogs. It is best located centrally in the house where there is some human presence or traffic around.

It is best to prepare the refuge as far ahead of the firework event as you can. Your dog must always be able to get to this place whenever he is frightened.

ADVANCE PREPARATION: CREATING A REFUGE:

Install a Dog Appeasing Pheromone (DAP) diffuse in the home, preferably close to or inside the dog's hiding place. The DAP diffuser is a device that looks like an air freshener that you plug into a wall socket. IT produces a smell like a chemical your dog's mother used to calm her puppies. DAP diffusers are available from your veterinarian and should be left operating 24 hours a day. If possible, install the diffuser a couple of weeks before a known phobic causing event, like fireworks, as this will produce a more powerful effect. DAP makes the dog feel much more relaxed and confident when they might otherwise be stressed.

Put in lots of blankets in the bolt hole for your dog to dig and burrow in Preferably placed in a corner where the dog has already tended to dig or hide. Include old, unwashed pieces of your clothing, like a woolly jumper, so your dog can smell your scent and feel comforted by your indirect presence.

Try to minimize the amount of outside noise entering the bolthole room. Close the windows and use heavy curtains to block out all light particularly the flashes of lighting.



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Double-glazing, security shutters and even boarding up windows will reduce the vibration of the windows from the claps of thunder.

Bowls of food and water are essential and it is a good idea to make sure your dog has emptied its bladder and bowels an hour prior to the noise phobic event starts.

Hide a few special treats in the bolthole in case he fancies something chewy to reduce his tension. However, do not worry if he does not seem interested – some dogs are simply not interested in treats at times like this.

Moderately loud rhythmic music with a good beat is an effective way to mask the fireworks, so put a hi-fi system in the room and keep the volume comfortably loud. However, every dog is an individual and if yours is not partial to music at other times you should respect his personal taste!

The designated hiding place must be accessible to your dog at all times and it is vital you make sure doors are fixed open so the dog is not locked in or out of the bolthole room.

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

If you know a fireworks display is due on a particular evening, then give your dog a large, stodgy, carbohydrate rich meal late in the afternoon of that day. Pasta, mashed potato or overcooked rice are ideal and will help make your dog feel calm and sleepy as the night draws in.

Make sure your pet is kept in a safe and secure environment at all times to prevent him from escaping if there is an unexpected sudden noise.

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Keep your dog on a lead, in public and make sure gates, fences and doors are secure.

If your veterinarian has given you medication to reduce your dog's fears, make sure you follow the prescription precisely and give the dog the medication in plenty of time for it to work.

WHEN THE NOISES START:

As soon as the fireworks display starts, lead your dog to the bolthole and encourage him to stay there.

Do not get cross with your dog when he is scared, as it will only make him more frightened.

It is tempting to try to soothe your dog to relieve his fears but this is the worst thing to do. It gives your dog the impression there is something to be frightened of and may even reward him for being scared. Also, if your dog comes to think of you as the only person who can soothe his fears, he may panic if there are fireworks when you are not around to help.

Ignore your dog when he is looking frightened and only show attention and affection with any sign he/she has begun to relax. Then you can give your dog a game and some food treats as a reward.

It is a good idea to try to keep your dog in a happy mood by playing lots of games and doing little bits of training using food rewards. This will stop him from falling into a state of anxious tension, but do not expect too much.

Ignore the noises yourself and appear happy relaxed and unconcerned. If your pet is only mildly fearful, you could try and encourage him



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in some form of game. Playing a game with another dog may help especially if the fearful dog is tempted to join in.

If your pet is very frightened by the noises and cannot be encouraged to play, then lead him to the bolthole you have created.

If your dog is really terrified of fireworks then you could give him some earplugs to block out some of the noise. Doggy ear plugs are available from some pet stores and veterinarians, but you can also make them out of rolls of wrung out damp cotton wool. However, it is important to take care and make sure you do not push them in too far down into your dog's ear/ You must also make

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sure you remove them and throw them away afterwards. Care must be taken the earplug is not so tight it falls out, or so fat it hurts when you put them in.

Lastly, having to go through fireworks this year, you need to start to do something about your dog's phobia now!. Many dogs can be treated using behavioural methods called desensitization and counterconditioning. Specially made recordings of fireworks can be used to training dogs not to react to the noises they fear. CD's of fireworks, thunder and other noises are available from reception.