

How to Overcome Noise Phobias

Compact discs can now be ordered to help treat pets with a variety of noise phobias. The noise phobias frequently encountered can broadly be in one of three categories:

1. Fireworks and similar “bangs”, eg: bird scarers, guns, cars backfiring.
2. Thunder and associated noises, such as heavy rain, hail, lightning.
3. Everyday noises, eg: crowd cheering, babies crying, heavy traffic (especially in wet weather).

These CDs have been especially formulated by behavioural experts. Good quality discs are essential. Similarly, equipment used to play the sounds needs to be of a sufficient quality in order not to dull the sounds.

The basis of treating noise phobias is first to get a pet used to hearing the sounds it finds frightening. By repeatedly playing the sounds at such a low level that they do not cause any anxiety and then only very very slowly increasing the volume of the noise, but only if no anxiety is shown, can a pet change and learn not to fear certain noises. The pet needs to twitch its ears, thinking “did I hear something or not”, so you know it is aware of the noise, yet shows no reaction. It may take days, weeks or even months of repeatedly playing these tapes to enable a pet to overcome its fears, hence why a behavioural modification program needs to be carried out well in advance of Fireworks Night, if fireworks is the problem. It is **not** a “quick fix” solution, but **is** a long term solution.

This method of behavioural modification is called **desensitization**.

Unfortunately, even if a pet is doing well on this regime, a really loud noise may reverse the situation and make things worse again.

Therefore another regime called **counter-conditioning** needs to be introduced as well.

The aim is to have the pet engaging in and enjoying good things, such as cuddles, food treats, games or toys, whilst it is hearing the noises it used to fear. If a pet is relaxed and happy, it cannot exhibit anxiety and fear. These two emotional states are complete opposites and so are not compatible. Therefore, the pet has been changed from “I hate this noise” to one that thinks “great, that noise means I’m going to have a treat or a game”.

The key to success is to progress slowly and gradually. A pet can only change as fast as it is capable of re-learning. Some take longer than others.

It is important to vary the time and the place where the CDs are used. Also, vary the length of time the CDs are played for.

Using a DAP Diffuser for dogs or Feliway Diffuser for cats (available from Reception) at the same time as these regimes are to be carried out has been shown to really help.

Some people prefer to make up their own tape recording. With pets phobic to bangs, a child’s cap gun can be used, at first using it well muffled by being wrapped in a blanket or by firing it from another room, or even down the garden, in order to obtain a quieter bang.

Pets that are phobic to certain noises will soon pick up signals associated with the noises or start to become fearful with other noises and so with time the problem becomes worse. It will never improve on its own unless a pet becomes deaf with old age.

Another method that occasionally has been used to treat phobias is called **flooding**. This involves bombarding the animal with the stimulus that causes the fear, whilst preventing it from escaping. The idea is to make it “face up” to its fears and learn that nothing untoward will happen. However, the fear from the beginning is often so intense, and will become worse, that the pet is just incapable of learning and so just becomes far more phobic. This method is now considered outdated, as it rarely works.

Overcoming noise phobias requires dedication, but it does work and prevents your pet from suffering further. It is worth it. Please contact the practice if you would like to order a CD. The price at the time of printing is approximately £25 + postage and packaging.





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