



TOP TIPS TO HELP AN ANXIOUS DOG

Avoid reinforcing the fear



During a stressful moment it is important to keep calm yourself and act as normally as possible. No yelling at your dog to be quiet or to toughen up, but, likewise, no baby voices, hugging or picking them up, all of which can reinforce or encourage their fears.

Teach your dog 'look at me' (see p. 113) so you can distract him from reacting to a trigger. In instances where your dog does not react to the trigger and remains calm, it is important you reward this desired behaviour. The reward will reinforce the calm behaviour and create a positive association.

Separation anxiety

The most powerful solution to treating dogs with separation anxiety is human company. This doesn't necessarily mean you, the owner, either. I have many clients that drop their dog off for doggy daycare at Pooches HQ and I can tell you those dogs are in the door without a backwards glance as their owner waits for that whimper goodbye and gets nothing but a wagging tail running off into the distance.

If you can't afford doggy daycare or a dog minder, then see if a neighbour, family or friend that works from home is happy to help out,



or hire a dog walker to break up their day which can be more affordable than doggy daycare.

LET THEM INSIDE!

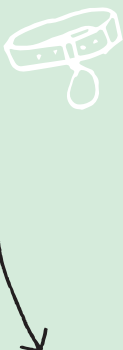
If you can't arrange human company, the next method to treating separation anxiety in dogs is to provide an environment in which the dog can relax when nobody is home. For many dogs this is achieved by simply having access to inside the house where they can snuggle in a spot that smells most of you.

CHANGE YOUR ROUTINE WHEN HEADING OUT

A way to help is to change your routine each day. Go out to your car with your keys and bag and come back in, sit down on the couch, turn the TV on and then head out again, only to come back inside again and do something else before quietly departing for the final time with little fuss. That way your dog doesn't get to know your every move and work themselves into a stressed state before you've even left them. If you pop back in and out, they can start to be desensitised to the departure a bit. This does take a lot of time and patience, but it is worth a try. Search for separation anxiety on pochesatplay.com to watch my video as to how this is done.

IMPLEMENT SOME INDEPENDENCE TRAINING

Talk to a dog trainer or vet about how you can start doing some independence training with your dog so that they are slowly re-introduced to spending more time alone, even when you are at home. This might be leaving them outside where they can still see you but occupied by a recreational bone (see pp. 70–71 for guidelines) or an interactive toy to work their brain and body.



**DOGS LEARN OUR
ROUTINE SO CHANGE
IT REGULARLY
BEFORE DEPARTING
THE HOUSE**

Refer to pp. 144–145 to where I talk about environmental enrichment to help ensure your dog has plenty to do when you are out, coupled with the independence training.

Thunderstorms and fireworks

Desensitising your dog to fireworks and thunderstorms as a puppy is the best way to ensure your dog will be unfazed by these noises later in life. However, for dogs that already have noise phobias it may take many weeks or months with the help of a professional to resolve the issue, if at all. So, to help here are some things you can do when you know it is going to be stormy or fireworks will be on.

🐾 SECURE IN A CRATE OR ROOM INSIDE THE HOUSE

If your dog is crate trained, then during a thunderstorm or fireworks display secure him in his crate with a chew toy or bone to occupy his time. If he's not crate trained, place his bed in a bedroom during the fireworks.

Find a room in the house (often the main bedroom is best as it also has a strong smell of you, particularly if you are not going to be at home) where the windows can be closed and put blinds down to help insulate them from seeing and hearing the storm. Place their dog bed or crate inside the room to help keep them sheltered with their usual blanket and favourite toy for comfort.

🐾 IF OUTSIDE – KEEP THEM SAFE

If you definitely can't leave them in the house during a thunderstorm or fireworks then make sure they have a protective kennel or area in the shed with a bed or blanket to keep them comfortable, warm and feeling protected.

If you don't have a shed, place their kennel close to the backdoor, under shelter and give them a bone or chew toy to keep them occupied, and

ensure you escape-proof your yard. Dogs have been known to plunge from balconies, scale fences or burst through windows and walls when their fear is so great, so don't underestimate the threat.

SOUNDPROOF THE AREA

Close all windows to the room they are being kept in, draw the curtains or blinds and play the radio or TV in that room and others in the house, to create a lot of white noise. Be mindful of the volume and what TV station it is on to avoid further frightening noises emitting from the TV.

CREATE A POSITIVE ASSOCIATION

If you are at home with your dog during fireworks or a thunderstorm, particularly when you bring a new puppy home during their critical period then it is important to remain calm and relaxed, even if they think the world is caving in around them. We need to show them there is no danger, as they will be looking to us for reassurance. Darcy is sensitive to thunderstorms and fireworks but rather than make a fuss, I get out his favourite ball or squeaky toy and play games during the noise, to distract and counter-condition at the same time to help create a positive association with these sounds.

PHEROMONE-BASED PRODUCTS AND HERBS

Pheromone-based collars, sprays and adapters you plug in the wall may also help some dogs with noise phobias.

THUNDERSHIRTS

Some dogs respond well to the use of a Thundershirt, particularly if it is also combined with calming herbs or pheromone products. The theory behind these is that they wrap tightly around them like they are being held or being cuddled, which can help reassure them.