



# Overcoming a Fear of Loud Noises

It's normal for some animals to be frightened by loud or sudden noises. They can express fear by barking, cowering, destructive behavior, or throwing fits. We often make mistakes which make the situation worse. First, never reprimand or punish the animal for her fear. 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 word; she'll think she is receiving a reward by your actions and tone of voice. The pet usually concludes she's doing the right thing by acting nervous because you are so approving of her.

## **Treatment**

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Sometimes stopping the unintentional reward stops the fearful behavior. But, until your pet is over her fears, it's best to confine her to a place where she can't hurt herself or destroy your property. A crate is ideal. 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 dogs, brush up on obedience training. Teach your dog a few tricks and games. It's difficult for a dog to be frightened when she's enjoying a favorite game of fetch. It's difficult to think about the storm outside when she's concentrating on a quick series of commands she's learned. Once you distract the dog 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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 games and tricks, the easier it will be for her to perform them under pressure.

Another method of helping your cat or dog 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 is increased so slowly that she hardly notices the change. Eventually she 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.