



Thunderstorm and Other Noise Phobias

Desensitization and counter-conditioning involve exposing your dog to the sounds and experiences that s/he finds frightening at levels just quiet enough that s/he is not bothered by them. Combining this with fun activities such as treats and play-time will enhance the experience and allow your pet to relax more and potentially overcome his/her fears.

The first step is to access recording of various noises that upset your pet. If you have an Echo or similar device, you can access these usually for free, i.e.-Alexa, play thunderstorm sounds continuously.

Next, start playing the noises at a level which does not upset your pet. Turn the bass up as much as possible to maximize the amount of vibration coming through the speakers. You may even want to try facing one speaker towards the floor. Provide treats and “entertainment” for several minutes when you first start the recording and any time you increase the volume. Over the course of days to weeks, slowly increase the volume until you’ve reached the maximum volume. At this point, you can start adding the “real” thing – have a neighbor a couple of blocks away shoot off (legal) fireworks, then a neighbor across the street, then in your own yard – not progressing to the next level until your pet consistently has no response to the noise.

If you are having difficulty progressing from one level to the next, we may want to try an anti-anxiety medication during the modification program which may allow your dog to be more responsive to the training. Er Yin Jian (prescription herbal), Solliquin, Rescue Remedy, NurtureCalm collars, and other natural anti-anxiety supplements may also be beneficial.

Swaddling shirts such as the Thunder Shirt (www.thundershirt.com) help many dogs relax more readily during storms and fireworks. The gentle, constant pressure is very soothing and stimulates the brain to release calming hormones.

Even if we cannot completely modify your pet’s behavior, we may be able to control it better, allowing you to minimize the use of drugs as much as possible.

Other tips:

1. Use a happy, jolly, playful voice--a hearty voice. This may help give your dog confidence. If you can get your dog to play with you during a storm, that is ideal.
2. If you know a storm is coming, skip a meal so that your pet is hungry when the storm comes. Give treats to your pet during the storm (or his/her own food if you pet really loves it). This helps to pair the fear with something they love, which helps reduce the fear.
3. Be sure to provide your dog with a safe place to be during storms indoors. Many dogs have been lost when they ran from their fenced yards in terror during storms. Your dog may want to rest in a dog crate in a quiet room or in a closet.
4. Background noise from the television or radio may be helpful.
5. Cotton balls in the ears can help reduce the volume of the noises heard. Just remember to remove anything you put in your pet’s ears within a few hours!