

Dog Fireworks Anxiety Prevention: How To Keep Your Dog Safe And Calm

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG As dog owners, the most important thing we can do for our dogs is to protect them. Make sure they can go through their life with zero unpleasant events happening to them. And today I'm going to share three strategies that every dog owner is going to want to know about. And hope they never have to use.

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. Today we're going to be talking about preparing your dog for the event of a fireworks display in your neighborhood. Now fireworks are beautiful, aren't they? They're amazing. They're spectacular. Unless of course you own a dog, who is afraid. But I would like you to think about it, even if your dog is not afraid of the sound of fireworks, which by the way is a growing population to dogs.

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Every year, tens of thousands of wildlife, birds, and animals either flee from their home or die in the midst of it. They get scared. They get anxious, they get stressed, and they flee. Birds have been known to get so confused that they fly into buildings. One year in Arkansas, there was 5,000 red-winged blackbirds that died in the midst of a firework display because they got so disoriented. It's gotten to be such a problem that one city in Italy has outlawed the use of fireworks.

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And it's getting to be a more common event in other cities around the world. Some cities have gone to silent firework displays. While others have gone to drone displays because they are spectacular in the numbered and the varied amount of colors that they can display in the midst of fireworks. So, there are alternatives and for not only animals and birds, but people.

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There's air pollution, there's noise pollution, and there's toxic elements that are released when these fireworks go off. So, the ideal situation is we could get rid of all fireworks and replace them with these spectacular drone displays or silent fireworks. Now that's not going to happen this year that's for sure.

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So, the next best thing we can do is to prepare our dogs. Now, if you're a brand-new dog owner, do not take this lightly. You have no idea the response your dog will have to fireworks. So, you want to listen to everything I say and prepare yourself with one of the three, possibly all three of the approaches that I have to preparing your dog and yourself for a local firework display.

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Now, first of all, there are people that unwittingly take their dogs to a firework display. Oh, nay nay. Keep your dogs home. It's just such a horrifically challenging event for sound sensitive dogs to deal with. So please do not take your dog to a firework display. And if there's going to be one in your neighborhood, oh my gosh, please, please, you've got to prepare your dog with one of the three approaches that I'm going to share with you today.



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The first thing you're going to do is do some research. You know at certain times a year there will be firework displays. Here in Canada, its Canada day, July 1st. Victoria Day, the 24th of May. There's certain weekends or days where we know there's a high probability of fireworks. Find out where your local fireworks is going to be and what time it's going to happen.

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Now, if this is happening close to your home, you may want to just go visit a friend somewhere else for the evening. Or hey, it might be a nice night to go and rent a local Airbnb out in the country. But if none of that is possible, it's okay. I've got three strategies ready for you. During that day, you want to make sure you get your dog outside, get lots of fresh air and get [a lot of exercise](#). We want our dog good and relaxed and tired by the time the evening rolls around. You want to give them their dinner nice and early long before there'll be any chance of fireworks happening.

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Now if you have a dog, you know already is sound sensitive then you will want to be proactive and start your counter conditioning desensitization program good and early. I'll get to that a little bit later on. So, the thing you want to do is make sure that you stay home. If you have a dog, whether you think that they're good with noise or not, you want to stay home and monitor them.

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You want to be there to support your dog because suddenly this may be the year that they get anxious and stressed at the sound of fireworks. So, three approaches you want to do. Before I begin, I don't want to discount the opportunity to maybe petition local events to maybe go to silent fireworks, wouldn't that be awesome?

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If that is not possible, if you have multiple dogs in your household and you know some are sound sensitive and some are not, I would separate them. When I have an older dog that is sound sensitive, I'll make sure my young dog stays away from them during thunderstorms or fireworks so that the young dog doesn't see the older dog being worried because that unfortunately can become a habit that a young dog picks up on.

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So, you're going to separate them. If you have a young dog and you have no idea what is going to happen, you want to start with the strategy that I call stimulate. So, stimulate can either happen with food or with toys, and it really is up to the dog. Which one are they more likely to really turn on to? And you can do a combination of both.

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So, let's say your dog loves toys. What you're going to do is you're going to work on teaching your dog a few games. Obviously for our students in Home School the Dog or Recallers, we've got you covered with a lot of games you can play with your dogs. If you don't have any [interactive games](#) that you and your dog play right now, I will leave a link to the show notes where you can find them right on my YouTube channel. So, these are great for young dogs. And what I would do is in the advent of a storm, as soon as it starts to rain, I would play low levels of games that 'rain happens, that's when fun begins'.



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And if there's thunder, every time you see a lightning strike you know thunder's coming so get ready with a big game of tug or chase, or tug and then chase and then some more tug. That interactive game starts when you see the lightning because you know the thunder is going to come soon. I call those 'thunder tug games' and they're awesome. If your dog loves scent work, you could do that during a thunderstorm. It's not necessarily toy focused, but you can hide their favorite toys.

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Take a bunch of couch cushions and pillows and scatter them all over the floor and hide things in there. Tell your dog to go find them. And then you can have a great game of tug when your dog finds their toy. You can do the same with food, hide more than one high value food. Now, make sure it's not greasy that you're not going to stain your cushions. So, make sure that it's maybe hidden in a Kong or something that will protect your couch cushions or your carpeting.

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So, stimulate by toys is about fun, it's about focus and it's about interactive games with you. Now, firework displays generally go on for 20 minutes, maybe 15, 20 minutes, a half hour. So, if you're going to be doing this, you're going to be exhausted.

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So, I would break it up with games that involve food as well. Scent work could be a great one. Hide cookies around your house and take your dog to different rooms to play search games during your firework display. And this works the same with thunder. So, fireworks display, tugging, or we're going to stimulate the dog with food games.

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Stuff some Toppls or Kongs ahead of time. And if you have a big dog, you can stuff a series of smaller ones so they finished one you can give them another one. Small dogs of course you don't want them to have too many Toppls. So, what you might want to do is use meaty bones that they can chew on.

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So, these are things that again, you can use them during thunderstorms or during fireworks. So big meaty bones keep them busy, keeps them distracted and creates an association between 'when fireworks happen guess what, we get these big treats that we love'. These are thunder bones or firework bones.

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So, play scent games, collect your toilet paper rolls for a couple of months, glue them all to a board. Maybe put cookies in each one and let the dogs rip them apart and find the cookies. Things like that. Interactive puzzle games are awesome for dogs during these times. It stimulates their nose, keeps them busy. They don't even recognize what's going on.

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Now all of that works great for dogs who are definitely not noise phobic or are definitely have never had a history of reacting or they maybe have a mild case of anxiety around noise. This potentially will help them overcome it.



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Especially if you are playing these ahead of time so that they learn, "Oh, I love it when we play this hide and seek with food games." "I love it when we play this hide the toy and I have to find it. Then we have a big celebration with a game." So, stimulate games are awesome for dogs who really don't get too anxious or who have never had any kind of response before.

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Next, we're going to go to the soothe category. And these are for dogs who potentially have a little bit of nervousness or anxiety and stress around loud noises. And with these and with the next strategy 'settle', you will want to do these long before you ever need them. So, you're going to maybe do it once a week. You're going to plan a little session where you take a different element from this, because what we want to do is create what's called a positive CER, a positive conditioned emotional response.

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And if you've listened to this podcast, you've heard me talk about CERs before in conjunction with doing something like [trimming your dog's nails](#) and make it a real positive event. So, what we want to do is we want to create things that the dog associates with just a calm, soothing time.

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Number one, you could use like a swaddling T-shirt. Something that goes around your dog's chest, and it holds them tight. Sometimes those alone, you can get things called [Thundershirts](#), help to calm the dog. I would suggest that you use these at times when you're going to just be chilling with your dog. So, they get to wear them at a time where they're not stressed panting and anxious already.

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So, associate these with calm times. You're just going to read a book for an hour, put one of these shirts on your dog and then take it off when you're done. So that they have that shirt on more often when there is no noise versus when it's only put on when you're really, really afraid.

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Another strategy for the soothing is to play classical music, create white noise, turn on a fan when you know there's going to be fireworks in your neighborhood. Nice and calming music. There's something called an [iCalm speaker](#) that just plays nice calming music, and you can actually get them with fireworks sound effects so you can prepare your dog ahead of time by playing these things at a very, very low level, seeing your dog's reaction and starting them to associate their positive CER in the presence of the sounds of fireworks.

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So, it's a great way, it's a great strategy to help prepare for this. Now of course, fireworks may be really, really loud. We don't want to start really, really loud. We want to make sure we [keep our dog under threshold](#) that no noise that they hear ever puts them into an anxious state. And you know what an anxious state looks like, the dog's [TEMP changes](#).

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Maybe you could see the whites of their eyes, maybe their ears pin back, maybe they start stress panting and their lips pin back. Or maybe they, you know, they just run and hide somewhere. They want to get under a bed or in a closet or in a dark, dark area.



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So those are graduating elevating levels of stress. We do not want to see that. We want to keep the dog under threshold so we can create positive conditioned emotional responses so that the dog can feel comfort in our soothing approach to dealing with fireworks.

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Another thing that you could use, there's a lot of actual doggy headsets on the market. And you can condition your dog just like you would condition your dog to a muzzle. Exactly what I talked about in Shaped by Dog podcast [episode number 153](#). I talked about conditioning your dog to a muzzle where you would do the exact same process, condition your dog to wear a headset.

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Now again, you can't just buy this head gear and slap it on your dog because they are probably going to be as irritated by this thing on their head as they are by the fireworks. So, you need to gradually condition your dog to wear this ahead of time, so that they aren't freaked out by this on their head as they're freaked out by the noises that are in their environment.

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So nice soothing things. You might want to try just hanging out with your dog, long strokes to their ears or body strokes, giving them a massage. That alone will help soothe the dog who's just at a lower level of anxiety with the fireworks and the environment. Just having you home will do a lot to soothe any of these dogs that are at this lower level.

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Now dogs that are at a higher level of anxiety they obviously have had rehearsals of this experience. So physiologically they go from zero up to a high level of discomfort and anxiety. So, we want to be very vigilant at creating positive CERs for these dogs ahead of time. There's nutraceuticals like melatonin that may have a nice calming effect on your dog.

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Things like [DAP](#), which is a canine pheromone that you could either have plugged into your wall and it sprays into the aerosol into the room. Or you can put a little drop on your dog's collar. So, this has a calming effect. All of the things I talked about in the soothe category will also work when you create a positive CER for your dog in the settled category.

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So, the classical music, the iCalm, so we want to stimulate their sound with the music, the scent with the DAP, or sometimes there are essential oils could have a calming effect on the dog. And of course, the ear protection for your dog.

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If you know your dog is at a place where it's highly unlikely, they are going to be comforted with all of your preemptive work on creating positive CERs then have a backup plan of asking your Veterinarian to prescribe medication to help your dog be calm in the face of high stress, high anxiety noise in their environment. So just having that pharmaceutical around will give you an extra peace of mind.



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But take the time, ahead of times, how long at a time, like days, weeks, months. The longer the more often you can take one or two days a week and practice creating a positive conditioned emotional response to the sound, to the music.

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“When you hear this music that's when we all just chill and relax”. “When you have this sound in your environment that's when you're getting a massage and really good things happen”. So anytime you're going to stroke your dog, you might want to plug in some DAP. And so that they are conditioned that this sound, this feeling, this music, this all means it's time to chill and not be worried. That may be with some nutraceuticals, with the ear protection, you may not have to go to a Veterinarian prescription for your dog.

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The goal is to be proactive, to make sure that we can avoid any kind of anxiety for our dogs by doing what's best for them. And let's all get together and see if collectively we can't convince the world that the enjoyment that we get from seeing spectacular fireworks for a few minutes of time is not worth the stress and the anxiety and the disorientation of not just of our dogs, but of wildlife in general.

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So even if your dog doesn't have stress or anxiety, any one of these exercises is just going to create a fun exercise for you and your dog to do together. And you may be creating a great positive CER that you will want to use in the future.

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There you have it. Three strategies. They're going to help any level of dogs. Be proactive, help your dog and let's hope that in the future we're just going to be seeing beautiful drone light displays fireworks and nothing that has a potential to endanger our environment, our animals, or our wildlife.

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I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.

Resources:

[YouTube Playlist: Exercising Your Dog's Body and Mind: Tips and Games with Susan Garrett](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Dog Training Games with Susan Garrett](#)

[Podcast Episode 107: Pedicure Please: 3 Steps To Dog Nail Trimming Or Grooming Success At Home!](#)

[Thundershirt \(Calming Wraps\)](#)

[iCalmPet \(Calming Music\)](#)

[Podcast Episode 112: Stressed Dog? How Trigger Stacking Might Be Putting Your Dog Over Threshold](#)

[Podcast Episode 4: T.E.M.P. \(Tail, Eyes/Ears, Mouth, Posture\)](#)

[D.A.P. \(Adaptil\)](#)

[Podcast Episode 153: Dog Muzzles: Everything You Need To Know And How To Muzzle Train Dogs](#)



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About Susan

A world-leading educator of dog trainers, Susan is also one of the most successful agility competitors of the last three decades. She has won multiple Gold Medals at National or World Championship events with every dog she has ever owned over the past 30 years. Susan was one of the very first dog trainers to share knowledge online when she opened her "Clicker Dogs" website many years ago. Susan has helped hundreds of thousands of people enjoy a great relationship with their dogs through her workshops and keynote speaking around the world, award winning books, DVDs, magazine articles, blog posts, podcasts, free dog training and dog agility video series, and online dog training programs.



A natural teacher and an entertaining speaker, Susan is world renowned for her dog training knowledge and practical application of that knowledge. Her understanding of how to apply science-based learning principles to both competitive and family pet dog training has been pivotal in changing how dogs are trained.

Susan is now helping many thousands of dog owners in 82 countries have the best relationship possible with their dogs. The real joy for her comes from bringing confidence to dogs and their owner through playful interactions and relationship building games that are grounded firmly in the science of how animals learn.



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