

Client handout: Helping your dog during loud noise events

Hiding place

You should already have provided a hiding place for your dog. Make sure that this is accessible at all times.

Before the event starts

Some loud noise events are predictable; you may have advanced warning of a thunderstorm or firework display.

- Give your dog a stodgy, high carbohydrate meal about an hour before you expect the event to start. For example, a portion of overcooked rice or mashed potato, mixed with a little of your dog's usual food for flavour.
- After the meal, take your dog out to go to the toilet.
- Then make sure that windows and curtains are shut to help reduce sound levels.
- Turn on some loud music that will help to block out any noises that come from outside (don't do this if your dog does not like loud music).
- Put a chew or bone in your dog's hiding place, as an encouragement to go there (don't do this if your dog aggressively guards chews and bones).

During the event

- Your dog may seek reassurance from you, but it is important that you don't try to soothe or comfort your dog.
- Don't get cross with your dog, even if his/her behaviour becomes disruptive and annoying.
- Regularly check on your dog while he/she is in the hiding place. Offer gently praise and some food treats while your dog stays in the hiding place.
- If your dog comes out of the hiding place, encourage him/her to go back there, perhaps by offering some food treats.
- Try to act as a good role model; stay relaxed and calm.

After the event is over

When your dog has come out of hiding after an event has passed, it is tempting to show a lot of attention and encouragement, but it is better to continue to ignore your dog until he/she has fully settled down.

We want to encourage the dog to use the hiding place until he/she feels fully relaxed to come out. If we show a lot of attention too soon after the dog has come out of hiding, this works against what we want the dog to learn. Dogs that have been given mixed messages of this kind are more likely to stay unsettled during a noise event, going in and out of hiding rather than settling down.

Why shouldn't I soothe my dog?

Our natural response is to try to offer comfort and support when we see that our dog is afraid. This can make us seem worried and vulnerable, and confirms the dog's fear of what is happening. If we become the main source of security for the dog during times of stress, the dog may have greater difficulty coping when we aren't around.

It is much better that the dog learns to go somewhere safe to hide, rather than depending on people for comfort. We should act as good role models; remaining calm and relaxed as if nothing bad is happening, and helping to guide the dog to its hiding place. Above all, try to be consistent in the way that you manage and interact with your dog during loud noise events.