

Noise Desensitizing (puppy)*

***Note these are simplified steps as a general guided process. Further resources should be explored in the event of problems encountered. This is not a comprehensive guide to noise dismissal. Contact a veterinarian or an animal behaviorist if noise problems become an everyday issue. Also see training on Environmental Sensitivities.**

Objective(s):

Puppy remains calm and quickly recovers when loud unexpected noise occurs.

Examples are noises like fireworks, thunderstorms, the garbage truck, falling pots and pans. For some dogs, gun fire can cause fear imprinting especially in the crucial “fear imprinting” period between 8 & 20 weeks. (This can also happen at a fear period during 11-13 months.)

Quick Notes and Hints:

1. There are several types of behavioral training. One of the most common is desensitization and another is counter conditioning. Desensitization is usually the easiest and successful. It can also be a preventive measure to avoid the more complicated techniques. Desensitizing is the method used here as a preventive approach for dogs as they are exposed to noises.
2. Food is always fun and a good tool for training. But it can also be key in noise sensitization. Clanging a stainless-steel food dish at feeding time is a great way to make loud noises a good thing for your pup.
3. Play time = fun time. It is an excellent opportunity to expose your pup to unexpected noise and to associate noise and fun. Combining training (fun) and noise conditioning can be as easy as clapping your hands (noise) for a job well done. Be sure not to play so hard that your pup does not notice the noise. Make sure he hears it and the play is not so vigorous that the noise is “masked.”
4. DON'T coddle your pup when they are startled by something that will not harm them. (This may seem natural but it will only reinforce that your pup should be frightened.) Instead go about your business and interject something fun. Toss a ball their way, call them over to do a trick that they know will be rewarded by a treat.
5. DON'T use noise as a deterrent for bad behavior!! (Examples: Smacking a newspaper, shaking a can of coins or pennies, clapping your hands, or shouting to interrupt a “bad behavior.” This will only make common noises to be feared. (See Appendix 1)

Prerequisites:

Willingness to:

1. Stay up during a thunderstorm and play with your pup or do some training. If the storm is at a safe distance go outside and play.
2. Determine your dog's Highest Value Treat or Toy and always have it on hand for playing or working around noise.
3. Refraining from coddling your pup when he is started or frightened by a noise. This will only reinforce the fear. Instead distract, redirect, play, do something they love.
4. While watching your pup, make lots of extra noise in your home. Examples: Randomly clang pots and pans while doing dishes, let cabinet doors softly "slam," turn on the garbage disposal, put the automatic garage doors up and down, softly bang garbage lids on the pails. (See Appendix 2)
5. Take your dog everywhere you go or out to a different location at least one time each day. Take your dog on "field trips" to expose at a distance, common noises: Grocery carts banging, trucks idling, busy traffic, etc. (See Appendix 3)

Noise conditioning Equipment/Supplies/Materials

1. Pots and pans and your list from Appendix 2
2. List of field trips or daily "outings" from Appendix 3.
3. Cap gun or other "props" such as vacuum cleaner, drill, hair dryer.
4. Favorite Toys and/or treats
5. A cd, downloads, or music of thunder storms and or fireworks, or common sounds
6. Worksheets and homework from the Appendices
7. A journal to keep daily training notes

Steps/Techniques/Ideas:

Common Noises:

Desensitizing requires you to be conscious of noises that may be common for you but may not be for the dog the first time he hears them. It requires you to be playful in isolating noises and starting with your dog at a distance or while the noise is at a very low level.

1. From your list of noises on Appendix 2, pick a common household noise. For example, pots and pans banging.
2. Gather your dog's favorite treats or a toy. With the dog at a distance have someone softly bang the pots and pans one or two times.
3. At the same time the pans are banging, feed or engage your dog in gentle play.
4. Answer the following questions.
 - a. How did your dog react? Did he pin his ears? Did he startle? Did he try to run away? Was he unwilling to play or take treats? If so, begin at a further distance away and repeat, also notice if your helper is banging the pots and pans too loud.
 - b. If your dog is totally dismissing the noise, step a bit closer to the noise. Your dog will let you know if you are getting too close.
5. Practice the following day and days after if required.
 - a. As you get closer to the pots and pans, let your dog "see" the noise and what is happening. Sometimes this is all it takes to get used to the noise. Watch and read your dog's reaction.
 - b. How quickly does he notice the noise and then dismiss it? Do you need to back up? Further away or more less noise?
 - c. Once you can get right to the source of the noise, put a treat on or near the pot or pan and ask your dog to take it. Increase the noise level steadily over a period of days until you can drop a pot or a pan on the floor and your dog notices, but does not run away, bark or jump.

Spend NO MORE than 3 minutes working on desensitizing your dog in one session. Start and end with play using either food or toys.

6. Now, select a noise from Appendix 3 - one that is outside the house.
 - a. What will be your treatment plan?
 - b. Start at a distance with the noise level low. Play and offer your dog treats.
 - c. If he cannot play and is unwilling to take his favorite treat, you are too close.
 - d. Back up and find his comfort level. Start over.
 - e. Proceed in baby steps from there. No more than 3 minutes.

Sudden Environmental Changes: Your dog's reaction depends upon Your Reaction!

1. These are noises that suddenly occur, that are loud and isolated. You may hear them as common, but suddenly a relatively stable environment, that your dog is familiar, is disrupted: A sudden clap of thunder or a doorbell are examples.
2. You cannot desensitize your dog to every noise in the universe. Sometimes you are just caught "off guard." Over time as you introduce your dog to common noises, isolated noises will not startle him as much. He will be conditioned to react calmly. However, do not get caught up short. These noises will happen!
3. **But, you must remain calm.** If a noise suddenly happens and even you are startled, you must not show that you are startled. This emotion will telegraph to your dog that he is to be frightened - because you are! Dogs are geniuses at reading human body language.
 - a. Immediately, play with your dog if you can, or stand calmly beside him- if you are not in harm's way. Do not pick him up, make "cooing" sounds, or coddle him! Take deep breaths! If your dog looks at you, confidently smile back at him and play or walk.
 - b. If your dog remains anxious, it is important to calmly lead your dog away on his leash. Remove him completely from the situation.

Review your list of noises that are inside your home or ones that are outside the home. Can you identify any that might be isolated sudden noises? Write them down on Appendix 2 and 3.

If you can isolate them, allow him to hear and "see" the noise so if it ever occurs loudly and in isolation, he will be prepared. Find the noise (either by approximation using CDs or Apps,) or go be at a distance from the noise and feed and play for a few minutes.

Ideas/Suggestions/Problem Solving

1. Find some music with loud cymbal crashing or drums. You may find some artists / composers you've forgotten about Bach, Beethoven, Def Leppard, ZZ Top? Start at a low volume and work your way up all while playing and having fun with the pup
2. Clang the food dish before feeding time this makes for a good association between noise and food.
3. Depending on the sensitivity or specific fear (that you may have noticed) download thunderstorm or fireworks sound tracks. It's better to work on these noises at your will than mother natures. Remember to start at a low volume and gradually work your way up.
4. Make extra noise whenever possible doing dishes, yard work, cleaning cooking, or during a walk.
5. Have an assistant make loud noises in the distance out of sight during your training session or play time.
6. Have a noise making party. Invite friends over and give them common household noise makers, ie, hair dryers, drills, etc. Sit in a circle and give each participant a pile of your dog's favorite treat. Ask each person to call your dog's name to come to them. Do this round several times. Next ask the participants to call your dogs name and as the dog approaches, turn on their noise maker at the same time. Let them play and feed the dog as the noise goes on. Turn this into a great fun time to be with your friends, introduce your dog to new people and noise. The added advantage is that he quickly learns to come to the friendly sound of his name! For more information consult Ian Dunbar, Before and After Getting Your Puppy.



If you are training a gun dog or a companion dog these simple techniques can lead to a long and happy acceptance to noise. Whether it's seeing your pup sitting calmly by your children's side watching the fireworks or taking the pup to a parade or the drive-in movies or just knowing they won't be afraid during a thunderstorm.

References:

Puppy Culture

<https://www.puppyculture.com/>

Fear of Loud Noises | Whole Dog Journal

https://www.whole-dog-journal.com/issues/.../Dogs-Fear-of-Loud-Noises_5202-1.htm..

Mary Huntsberry is an **Associate Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist** based in Montgomery County, MD.

<https://www.helpingpetsbehave.com/recommendations/sound-desensitization/>

Ian Dunbar

Before and After Getting Your Puppy.

Appendix 3: Field Trip Noises

On the following table, list Possible Field trips and all the places you will take your dog. Note beside that location, what possible sounds you anticipate encountering. Add the ones that you actually did encounter. Note your dog's reaction and ones that may need some desensitizing and return visits.

Examples:

Drive throughs- Banks -swishing sound of transaction tube
Fast Food Places - Clanging, bells, people talking

Parking lots -

vets - dogs barking

shopping centers - grocery carts, manhole covers

lawn and garden nurseries - crates and pallets dropping

day care - doggy and children - children shrieking

Gas Stations

Truck Stops

Auto Repair

Construction Sites

Grocery Stores

Fairs

Parades

Pet Store

Parks

Neighborhood Walks

Training facilities or environment

Others:

