

Fear of Sounds by Marcia Albert

Desensitizing a dog to noises is a slow process, but as the dog's anxiety level lessens everyone, especially, the dog is much happier.

The first thing to do is to NOT comfort her when she is displaying distress. I know this sounds cruel, but when we make a fuss over the fact that the dog is upset we actually reinforce her behavior. The dog begins to feel that she should exhibit the fear response because we have rewarded it.

When you hear a loud sound try not to react. If your dog begins to shake, whimper, etc. go on about your activities...talk, whistle, clean, etc. Give her some calming signals-body language that dogs use to calm themselves and other dogs. Yawn, yawn, yawn and watch his reaction. If she yawns in return she is trying to return the signal to you and her yawning will begin to calm her.

Determine where these noises are originating and what type of noise is most troublesome. Sometimes the noise is coming from a clock or security device in our own home. I know that my dogs are very uncomfortable when these types of sounds go off. (We had a CO2 alarm that sounded occasionally because it wasn't working properly, and didn't have a clue that it was going off when we weren't home until one day we were home. Also, one of my dogs hates the sound from my cell phone when it signals a missed call).

Make certain that you identify the types of sounds. Then you can begin a very, very slow desensitization process of each sound. Desensitization would entail making a tape of one sound, playing it at a very low volume several times for a few days. Then very slowly increasing the volume over a period of time. If the dog is exhibiting anxiety you need to lower the volume. Once your dog is accustomed to the sound, begin on another sound.

If you are with your dog and far enough away from a sound that may increase in volume, give your dog treats that she loves every time the sound is heard.

Make certain you discuss her reaction to sounds to the vet. Your vet may have some excellent suggestions.

There are products (they work similar to plug in air fresheners) that have ingredients that help calm dogs.

Play a radio or TV while you are away to help mask sounds.

Leave an old pair of socks or any article of clothing with your or a family member's scent on it to help calm her while you are away.

Please remember desensitization is a very slow process, but it is worth it; and, when done, everyone will rest more easily.