



Celebrating Safely: Canine Firework Preparedness

While fireworks are enjoyed by many humans, most dogs are frightened by the unexpected and overwhelming noise. Unfortunately, we can't explain to them they're not in danger! While we may not all be able to pack up and head out of town for firework-heavy holidays, there are still many things we can do to help our dogs stay safe and sane when they occur.

Dogs have wide-ranging reactions to fireworks, from mild to severe:

Mild fear/discomfort

- Lip licking/ears back
- Pacing/can't settle
- Barking/whining
- Hypervigilance
- Panting
- Startling
- Yawning/shaking off
- Paw licking

Severe fear/panic

- Exit searching
- High respiration rate
- Drooling
- Trembling/shaking
- Running/hiding
- Escape attempts
- Howling/screaming
- Handling sensitivity/snapping

While the behaviors in the severe fear column might seem the most concerning, we don't want to ignore the milder fear behaviors. *Dogs can experience what's known as "trigger stacking,"* where small stressors add up to *bigger than normal reactions*. Fireworks on their own might only worry your dog, but combine that with a house party, and the stress might cause them to, for example, snap at a guest when they would have otherwise just moved away.

Because of this, we recommend preparing in advance so that when the big day finally arrives, you and everyone in your living space already knows what to do to help your dog feel safer and more comfortable. Every dog is different, so you'll want to tailor your approach to your dog's individual needs. Want help from a professional? [You can set up a free behavior helpline with our certified trainers at this link!](#)

How you can prepare for fireworks

- **Make sure your dog's identification is up to date.** This means secure tags, collars, and most especially microchips. If your dog gets lost, a microchip with up-to-date information is the most reliable way for you to be contacted.
- **Explore behavior medication: ASAP!** If you know your dog is noise-sensitive generally or sensitive to fireworks already, you may want to speak to your vet or a vet behaviorist about behavior medication. These medications can help mitigate some of the more extreme effects of noise-related fear. *We recommend reaching out to a vet well in advance*, not only to avoid the rush, but because most vets recommend doing a trial run to make sure the dosage is correct before using it on the big day.
- **Prepare a "sanctuary area."** Having a safe space to hide and sleep can make all the difference for your dog. Better yet, provide a couple of options for your dog to choose from. Examples include:
 - A cozy crate with some plush blankets and a blanket covering to dampen noise/visuals
 - A bathroom set up with a bed and some enrichment
 - A closet set up for your dog to lie down in, a dark room with the shades closed (may prevent flashes of light too, depending on where you are located)
- **Add background noise/dampening.** Dampen the sound of the noise preventatively. Keep a fan on, play gentle radio, classical music, or white noise in the background. Having a baseline of background noise can make louder noises less startling.
- **Keep your dog indoors if at all possible** when fireworks are most likely to happen. If you need to take your dog out, *make sure they are on leash, even in yards*. Time your potty breaks accordingly: if fireworks happen after dark, try to potty your dog before all of the commotion starts. Dogs can jump much higher fences than we think, especially when panicked.
- **Offer food enrichment.** Try for an emphasis on items that encourage chewing/licking/tearing up, such as chews, lick mats/frozen Kongs, or cardboard boxes or egg cartons with treats inside. *Licking and chewing can help dogs calm themselves*, and chewing/tearing things apart can be good constructive outlets for nervous frustration. It may be that your dog will be too stressed to eat, but we recommend having the option available. See our *Canine Enrichment* handout for tips!
- **Comfort your dog--if they seek comfort!** It is a myth that you can "reinforce fear" by offering your dog comfort during fearful moments. We are and should be sources of comfort for our dogs, especially in scary moments! However *we do want to make sure that comfort in that moment will actually make the dog feel better*. For some dogs, being held/petted while they are stressed can actually make them feel confined and cornered. Happily there is an easy way to tell. Offer your dog some interaction (petting/stroking/scratches), then stop, and see if they reengage. If they do, great! Continue! But if they don't engage, respect their decision to end the interaction. See our *Consent Checks* handout for tips!

For more information or to request behavior assistance, visit eastbayspca.org/behavior.

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