

## **FIREWORKS AND OTHER SCARY THINGS**

### **info to PREVENT fearful runaways:**

#### **More dogs run away on the Fourth of July than on any other day of the year.**

The sounds of fireworks – the artificial squeal followed by the giant burst of explosives and subsequent whimper – drives dogs nuts! And for many, it triggers their innate flight instinct.

Many people equate the sights and sounds of Independence Day fireworks with the trauma that dogs can experience in thunderstorms. But there's a difference. For one, thunderstorms are Mother Nature. Two, fireworks are closer to the ground and more vibrant. And three, dogs are not prepared for the sudden booms and flashes and burnt aromas that come with what is one of many Americans' favorite holidays. Remember, dogs experience the world through their senses – nose, eyes, ears.

So what do you do? Do you take your dog to the fireworks with you? Do you leave him home alone? Can you prepare him for this?

My suggestion is to take your dog **away from areas** where there will be a fireworks display nearby. Take them to your parents, grandparents, brother's or sister's house, or to a day care center they are familiar with and comfortable at.

Plan ahead -- if you are taking them to a new place they haven't been, expose them to the home or center in the days and weeks before the holiday, so when you take them for the Fourth, it's not a surprise and for them, it's just like any other day of the year.

**Don't think of this in terms of your dog as your child who is missing out on a great, fun time. That's human guilt and trust me, the dog won't know what he's missing.** You're being a good pack leader by not exposing him to a situation that will trigger his flight instinct in a negative way.

- **Keep your dog inside:** Many anxious dogs on the 4th of July have been known to run away from home and jump yard walls or fences, and dogs or puppies that are tied up outside may run away in fear and have so much fear and anxiety that they choke and strangle themselves if left tied up. (Never have your dog tied up outside without human supervision.)
- **Stay home with your dog:** Just because your dog or puppy is inside does not mean they will be safe or relaxed. Many anxious and fearful or phobic dogs on the 4th of July will become destructive in the house. This may include, but not limited to, trying to jump through open or closed windows, pulling down window curtains or blinds, jumping at, clawing or scratching at doors or screens to try to escape, running and hiding under furniture, destructive chewing, marking or fearfully urinating or defecating in the house, pacing, hyperventilating, and even self-mutilating behavior. Some anxious dogs left in dog crates, kennels or runs may try to chew their way out and do damage to their teeth and gums, or try to

claw or paw their way out, doing damage to their nails, pads, and feet. Don't come home to a bloody mess or a bloody dog.

- **Desensitize your dog:** Several weeks before the 4th of July, start a program of behavior modification to desensitize your dog to the loud sounds of the 4th of July fireworks. Desensitization is exposing your dog to the fearful sounds in a slow, quiet and progressive way, pairing a positive reinforcer like a very high-value food treat, toy reward, or pleasant massage with the sounds of fireworks. You can download fireworks sounds from iTunes, and begin by playing the sounds of fireworks at a very low and non-threatening volume. Play with your dog with a ball or toy and reward calm, relaxing behavior in order to condition him to hear the sound and interpret it as something good. Always start with the sound very low, and over time, as your dog learns to relax to the sounds, gently and gradually increase the volume and continue to reward relaxed behavior.

Some dogs can deal with the sights and sounds of fireworks if they've been desensitized, like hunting dogs for example, who are familiar with the sounds and smells of gunshots and gunpowder.

**But keep in mind, the soundtrack cannot replace the actual power of real fireworks.**

### **GET a THUNDERSHIRT – they work on most dogs**

- **Consider anti-anxiety medication:** Talk to your Veterinarian about short-term anti-anxiety medication for your dog or puppy. In some cases medication may be warranted and a needed option. There are many safe FDA approved behavioral medications for your dog, their fears, phobias and anxiety.