

## Tori Houle, Lifestyle Contributor and Junior Editor

Tori has more than 2 years of experience in the pet health industry and is junior editor of IDEXX's Pet Health Network team.

*The 4th of July holiday prompts celebration all across the United States, but for dogs and cats the festivities carry with them inherent dangers. We've gathered together important tips to help you and your pets stay safe and happy this 4th of July.*

[Mychelle Blake](#) has served as Chief Executive Officer for [The Association of Professional Dog Trainers](#) (APDT). Pet Health Network interviewed her on the topic of fireworks and loud noises around [dogs](#). Mychelle worked with Katenna Jones, Director of Educational Programs for the APDT, to supply us with these important answers.

### 1. How should someone go about desensitizing a dog to noises?

First, begin with the trigger, but play it at a very, very low volume. A recording device or downloaded MP3 of sounds can be quite helpful. As the sound is playing, ensure your pet is calm and relaxed. If they aren't, the sound is too loud. If they are, feed them appropriate snacks. If your dog is more attention or toy driven, play with them as the sound plays. Choose whatever makes your dog happiest. When the sound ends, the fun ends. Repeat until the dog completely ignores the sound – this may be one or two times, or daily for a week. It depends on your dog. Next, turn the volume up a tiny bit, and repeat. Over time, work in short (say 5 min) sessions several times per day, spread out by at least an hour between sessions. Keep going until the sound is booming through your home and your dog (or cat!) could care less. This can work with doorbells, thunder, truck engines, clippers, crying babies, or any sound that triggers any reaction in your dog.

### 2. Should you keep your dog in a calm or quiet room on the day of, or will that make

### them more riled up?

Yes! Most dogs prefer to be as far from fireworks as possible. Set them up in the quietest room, often a basement or closet. Provide a comfortable familiar bed and something to do, such as a Kong. Stuff the Kong with peanut butter, canned food, or something "soft" mixed with the dog's kibble, and frozen solid. If it's tasty, and the dog isn't stressed, it should provide entertainment for the duration of the fireworks. Also, consider a white noise machine to mask as much sound as possible, and some relaxation music turned up rather loud. Choose something soft, like, [Through a Dog's Ear](#), [Baby Bach](#), rainfall, waves on the back, or similar. Talking or "hard" music can actually add to the stress rather than help in some cases.

### 3. What is a "Thundershirt" and what does it do exactly? Are there any other types or devices that do the same thing?

Thundershirts can be wonderful for pets with various anxieties; however, some must first be conditioned to the sensation of the tight fitting garment. The idea is the shirt applies maintained pressure around the core of the body, thereby reducing stress and anxiety. The same concept applies "squeeze shoots" for cattle, or weighted vests or blankets for children with autism, ADHD, or other neurological disorders as well as other products for pets. There is quite a bit of research out there to support the concept.

### 4. If you're at a 4th of July BBQ and you notice a dog or two there that seem anxious or nervous, should you approach the owner and suggest bringing the dog inside before the fireworks start?

Ideally yes. However, no one likes feeling judged or like someone is telling them they are being a "bad parent," so tread lightly. You might try the approach of first befriending the dog and the owner, if you don't already know them. Ahead of time, suggest "Hey, I was wondering if I could take your dog inside for you when the fireworks start? The fireworks are really loud here,

and I know they really hurt my dogs' ears. They hurt mine too - I have to wear earplugs! (Laughter.) I know of a really quiet place where he'll be very safe, and I even have a bone for him to chew on. That way, you can just relax and enjoy the show and not have to worry at all! I can show you where it is, or I can take him for you?" But be prepared to be declined, and have to watch helplessly as a dog struggles with the fireworks, next to an owner who doesn't seem to realize it. You might also or instead offer to sit next to the dog and comfort him, or cover his ears if the owner wants him left outside. Just use caution, and avoid making the situation worse by encroaching on the dog's space: stressed out [dogs] often snap out of fear.