

When Your Dog Bolts at Every Bang

Understanding noise fear, securing everyday life
and preparing for New Year's Eve



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Contents

Before you start, check what applies	3
Part I · The night when nothing works anymore.....	4
Part II · Looking closely and sorting it out	7
Part III · Securing everyday life.....	11
Part IV · When training works and when it doesn't.....	15
Part V · When a workbook is no longer enough	18
Where the knowledge comes from	20
Worksheets.....	21
Imprint.....	29

Before you start, check what applies

- ☐ He crawls away and hides during thunderstorms.
- ☐ New Year's Eve is the worst night of the year.
- ☐ He trembles, pants or drools when things go bang.
- ☐ He no longer wants to go outside in certain weather.
- ☐ By now he also startles at everyday noises.
- ☐ It has gotten worse over the years.

You'll transfer the lines you checked to Worksheet A later. The last item is the most important: if it applies, Part III is more urgent than Part IV.

Where to begin

If your dog has ever injured himself or escaped in a panic: start with Part V, and do it today. Then come back here.

If New Year's Eve is less than four weeks away: read Part III and Part V. Skip Part IV for this year; you'll find the reason there.

If your dog barks at noises without seeming afraid: read Part I and Part II. After that you'll know whether your situation is about fear or about something else.

Otherwise, go in order.

Part I • The night when nothing works anymore

The question this part is about:

What is happening to my dog?

The first bang

It's December 31, shortly after eight. It's dark outside, you've eaten, and somewhere two streets over someone sets off the first firecracker.

Your dog is gone before you can lift your head.

You find him in the bathroom, between the washing machine and the wall, panting. You go over, talk to him, stroke him. He doesn't look at you. When the next bang comes, he pulls back even further.

It goes on like this until well past midnight. The next morning he won't eat, and on the afternoon walk he stops at the front door.

This night is neither the beginning nor the end. It's the point where something that has been building for months becomes visible, and it helps decide what the next year will look like.

This workbook is about that night, and about the eleven months before it.

What this workbook does

It separates two things that are constantly confused: securing and practicing.

Securing means making sure your dog gets through a night like the one above without things getting worse. You can always do that—tomorrow, too, even without preparation. It's the larger part of this workbook, and it's the part that actually changes something on New Year's Eve.

Practicing means working over weeks and months so your dog copes better with noises. That only works outside the season, and it's the smaller part.

On top of that you get two numbers that show you whether anything is moving: the volume or distance at which your dog still stays relaxed, and the time he needs afterward to come back down.

At the end you won't have a dog who doesn't care about fireworks. You'll have one who has a place he can go to, and a year in which things didn't get worse.

What it doesn't do

It doesn't make a diagnosis, and it doesn't replace a veterinary workup. With this topic, that isn't a formality: some of these dogs are in pain, and some need medication. Both come from the vet practice, not from a workbook.

It isn't a workbook for dogs who have escaped in a panic or injured themselves. If that has happened to you, read Part V first, and do it today.

It isn't a guide for the week before New Year's Eve. If you're reading this in December, only Part III applies this year. Part IV explains why.

And it doesn't cover barking at noises without fear. That looks similar and has different causes.

What you need

A room that can be darkened and faces the street as little as possible.

Material for the retreat: a blanket, a crate or a table he fits under, and something that absorbs sound.

A sound source for background noise. Radio, fan, TV—whatever you have.

A well-fitting harness he can't wriggle out of, and a leash. For the yard, too.

The worksheets from the appendix and a pen.

And, if you're early enough, an appointment at the vet practice. Not on December 30.

How to read on

Part II describes how to tell how bad it is for your dog, and introduces the two numbers.

Part III is the securing part: retreat, room, escape-proofing, the plan for New Year's Eve day. If you're short on time, that's the part.

Part IV is the step-by-step program, and it only applies outside the season.

Part V is for when more is needed than a workbook can give, and for the conversation about medication.

The statements in this workbook are based on research. To keep the text readable, the sources aren't in the middle of it but collected at the end under "Where the knowledge comes from." If you don't need them, skip them.

What noise fear is

Three things often get lumped together here, and it pays to separate them.

The startle. A loud noise, your dog jumps up, and seconds later he's lying down again. That's a normal startle response and not a problem.

The sensitivity. He reacts more strongly to noises than other dogs, takes longer to settle again, is harder to reach when it's loud. That isn't fear yet, but it's the stage at which something can develop.

The fear. He tries to escape the situation: hiding, fleeing, sticking to you, getting out of the yard. Add to that physical signs he can't control: trembling, panting without exertion, drooling, dilated pupils.

The question isn't whether your dog is afraid or just sensitive. The question is where he stands on this path right now, and which direction he's moving in.

Why it usually gets worse, not better

The sentence owners hear most often on this topic is: he'll grow out of it.

He won't grow out of it. In a large survey, reactions to fireworks, gunshots and thunderstorms often occurred together. A dog who starts with one noise rarely stops there.

The reason lies in the nature of the thing. Your dog can't know which noise is coming next, and he can't influence the situation. What he can learn is that something is happening outside that isn't good for him. And that learning isn't limited to New Year's Eve.

And the reverse is true too: a single well-prepared New Year's Eve is worth more than any exercise in November.

What you take away from Part I

Securing and practicing are two different things. You can always secure; you can only practice outside the season.

Startle, sensitivity and fear are stages on the same path.

Noise fear usually spreads. A dog who reacts to fireworks often reacts to thunderstorms and gunshots too.

Waiting it out isn't a strategy—it's a repetition.

Some of these dogs are in pain, and some need medication. Both belong at the vet practice early, not on December 30.

Worksheet A • The noise list

Write down what your dog reacts to, and how strongly. Whatever you haven't observed stays blank. You won't find it out by trying it.

Dog: _____ List started on: _____

Noise	Intensity 1–5	What he shows	Recovery in minutes
Fireworks, firecrackers			
Thunderstorm, thunder			
Gunshots, hunting			
Construction, jackhammer			
Garbage truck			
Smoke detector, beeping			
Slamming door			
Vacuum cleaner			

Intensity 1 is brief alerting, intensity 5 is flight or panic. The last column is the most important: it tells you how long an event lingers, and it's the number that improves first.

This is the end of the preview.

When Your Dog Bolts at Every Bang

The complete workbook has 29 pages and 7 worksheets to print out. You get it as a PDF right after purchase.

€9.90, one-time payment, no subscription.

Get the workbook:

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