

# *Angelic Dogs*



*Through your dog's eyes....*

## ***Fear of fireworks.***

As those of you living in the UK are aware it is coming up to the time of year where our animals have to contend with fireworks. Those of us living in other countries will have them at other times of the year, over here in Portugal we seem to have them on a very regular basis.

For many dogs, fireworks are not an issue but for some it can be a very distressing time for them.

I have put together a free E Book on how to make firework season more comfortable for your dog which can be downloaded from [www.angelicdogs.com](http://www.angelicdogs.com).

In this article we will have a brief look at why our dogs become fearful of various things.



## ***Why do our dogs become fearful?***

Fear is a very natural behaviour for our dogs, it helps with survival, if they approached everything in full gusto this would put their survival in jeopardy. Therefore it is in their best interests to be wary sometimes to avoid any harm coming to them. Most dogs can cope with fear if they can predict what will happen and have a means to get away from it.

Fear becomes a problem for them when their reaction to a situation becomes totally out of proportion interfering with their normal function and leading to possible injuries, this is known as a phobia.



Unfortunately when our dogs are reacting like this instead of a quick recovery that is seen with a normal reaction of fear they remain in a phobic state well after the event has passed, having a profound effect on their health, quality of life and your enjoyment with your dog. Each time our dogs experience the fearful situation it becomes worse and also runs the risk of our dogs becoming fearful of other things that are similar to the original fearful situation.

We owe it to our dogs to either avoid this occurring or help them if they do become phobic.

Fear/Phobias can occur for several reasons, genetics, learned unpleasant experiences, inadequate socialization, medical reasons and also for reasons we will never know. Fear is a behaviour that works for our dogs as it usually results in the fearful situation going away, if this does not happen, as in the case of fireworks, they don't go away until the display has finished our dogs can become very distressed as the expression of fear no longer results in the situation becoming better for them.

This is why punishment is very inappropriate, punishing a dog for what they consider normal behaviour will only lead to confusion and make the fear worse.

## ***How can we help our dogs?***

The best ways to help your dog overcome inappropriate fearful reactions are through two methods known as desensitization and counter-conditioning. Desensitization is where the fearful situation is presented to our dogs at a level that does not trigger a fearful reaction and then the intensity is gradually increased until they can cope with the fearful situation as it would normally occur showing no fear at all.

The downside is that our dogs should never experience a fearful reaction during this program, otherwise the promise we make to them that this situation is nothing to be fearful about is broken and it becomes harder to communicate this to them.

Counter-conditioning is where we pair the fearful situation with something that our dogs find absolutely wonderful. Basically we are keeping our dogs in an emotional state that is incompatible with fear. These two methods are usually used alongside each other.

Another method that has been used is known as flooding, however this is not a method that has the dogs best interest at heart. Flooding involves exposing our dogs to the fearful situation continuously until they show no fear. This is very stressful for the dog and very dangerous for the owner.

Sometimes our best efforts do not have the affect we wish them to have due to lots of reasons. Reasons we need to consider that are very difficult for us to control are factors that predict the fearful event i.e. bonfire smells, whistles, darkness, flashing lights etc. Also we never know 100% what our dogs are associating the fearful situation with, therefore making desensitization difficult.

If your dog really cannot cope with fireworks it is important you help them to cope better, through behavioural modification with the help of a professional. This needs to be started whilst there is very little/no chance of the fearful situation occurring. In the meantime there are ways to make your dog feel more comfortable during the firework season. Please download our free E Book on How to make firework season more comfortable for your dog, you need to get started now so don't delay in helping your dog feel more at ease this year.



*Lets help our dogs move from this emotional state.....*



*.....to this emotional state.*

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