

# Texas Veterinary Behavior Services

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## Preventing Sound Sensitivity in Puppies

Sound sensitivity in puppies is a strong emotional or physical response to a sudden or loud sound within the environment. Sound phobia can result in self injurious behaviors such as a dog jumping through a glass window, escaping through doors, and chewing holes into drywall. Puppies with markedly fearful reactions may try to pull out of their collars and run away; thereby putting themselves at risk of being lost or hit by a vehicle.

It's impossible to predict which puppies will be more likely to develop noise sensitivity and which will not. Some dogs likely will develop noise phobias despite preventative training, but like other socialization experiences, preventative work for noises may reduce the likelihood that your dog has a noise issue as an adult.

This process introduces the puppy to a variety of noises in a gradual manner while pairing the noise with something pleasant so the puppy learns that such noises predict good things.

### What you'll need:

Start by finding a variety of reinforcers your puppy absolutely loves. These could be treats, a puzzle feeder toy, favorite toys, a play session (fetch/tug), grooming/brushing, or a combination of these.

Have an audio recording of the sounds you will be introducing. Below are listed a few common sounds:

- Thunder
- Fireworks
- Gun shots
- Backfiring truck
- Lawn equipment
- Clattering pots
- Vacuum cleaner
- Kitchen appliances (blenders, coffee makers, microwave, etc)

### How to get started:

Be sure to introduce your puppy to one sound at a time as to not overwhelm her. Keep the session short (no more than 5 minutes).

- Have the appropriate audio recording ready. You will need to first be able to easily control the volume as well as the duration that the file plays. Be sure to listen to the entire audio recording before using it to train your puppy so you are familiar with the sounds and the volume.
- Training should take place in a relatively distraction free area where the puppy is already comfortable.
- Train when the puppy is rested and a little hungry, not when she is tired, full, or otherwise feeling poorly.
- Begin by playing the audio at a low enough volume that your puppy notices it but does not show signs of anxiety/fear. (Signs of anxiety can include startling, one paw raised, yawning, wet dog

shake, moving away/retreating, tucked tail, ears back, refusing food or toys, hiding, panting, whining, or barking.)

- Start by playing the audio for 5-10 seconds and then shut it off for 10-30 seconds.
- As soon as your puppy notices the sound (e.g. head turns, ears perk up) start feeding your puppy or start the game. If you are using treats, reward frequently (1 treat a second or as fast as you puppy will take food) the entire time the recording is playing.
- Vary how long the audio plays on each trial and how long it is shut off so it is unpredictable to your puppy.
- If the puppy loses interest in the food or game, or the food runs out, STOP the recording at that time! The conditioning is most effective if the pairing between the sound and the food/game is clear and consistent (sound starts, food starts. Sound stops, food stops.)
- This process can be repeated three or four times during each training session.
- Over time, training sessions can be modified by increasing the volume in small increments or extending the duration of the audio. Only change one of these criteria at a time (e.g. play the audio longer at the same volume OR increase the volume at a shorter duration).
- The volume should be raised in small enough increments that the puppy does not show anxiety/fear. It is important to proceed slowly with this process so that the puppy truly learns to accept the noise at each volume before proceeding to the next.
- You can also increase the difficulty of the training by changing the source location of the sound (different rooms, inside vs. outside, etc.)
- This process can be repeated with any sound your puppy is likely to encounter in the course of her routine life.
- When introducing a new sound you must start over from the beginning of the training process (low volume and short duration) and gradually work up to a louder volume and duration again.
- If at any time, your puppy becomes anxious or appears fearful stop the audio and either decrease the volume or the duration in which the audio was playing. Remember to go slow and to keep the training sessions short and fun.

#### In conclusion:

There is no guarantee that a puppy will not develop sound sensitivity at some point in their life even if preventative measures are taken; however, exposing your puppy to a variety of sounds should be part of every early socialization program.

If your puppy already has significant sound sensitivity please contact a licensed professional to help you address this. Reputable sources include:

- American College of Veterinary Behaviorists <http://www.dacvb.org/>
- American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior: [www.avsab.org](http://www.avsab.org)
- Karen Pryor Academy <https://www.karenpryoracademy.com/find-a-trainer/>
- International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants: [www.iaabc.org](http://www.iaabc.org).

#### Additional resources:

- *Puppy Start Right: Foundation Training for the Companion Dog* by Debbie Martin and Kenneth M. Martin
- *Perfect Puppy in 7 Days: How to Start Your Puppy Off Right* by Dr. Sophia Yin