



THE BIG BANG

SKYHARDT'S FIREWORKS TOOLKIT

Written and designed by Kate Keen and Deanna Midnight

THE MULTIMODAL APPROACH

Why are fireworks such an issue for dogs?

Sound - this is the most obvious one, but is by no means the **only** factor. Bangs, whistles etc.

Smell - flash powder, other chemicals.

Taste - chemicals and burnt particulates in the air.

Sight - bright lights, flashes etc.

Touch - feeling of shock waves from explosions.

Vestibular - air pressure changes affect the vestibular system (inner ears etc) & balance.

Proprioception (awareness of body in space) - air pressure changes are disorienting.

Signs your dog isn't coping:

Pacing; panting; lip licking; hiding; shaking; crawling; toileting in the house; seeking comfort; trying to escape; scratching; digging; destructive behaviour; drooling.

Since you're here, you've already spotted at least some of these.

Observation is really important! What exactly does your dog react to? You can take some clues from thunderstorms, for example. If your dog is really upset before the noise starts, they're probably reacting to the air pressure change rather than the thunder.



Observation is really important!
What exactly does your dog react to?

MANAGEMENT BEFORE, PART 1

Before fireworks seasons starts

Dogs find everything harder to deal with when their stress bucket is full. Pain is the biggest bucket filler. Behaviour changes such as sudden noise sensitivity are a key indicator for pain. Visit your vet, and if they don't find anything, suggest a pain relief trial.

Try not to have a specific fireworks routine - it can be an indicator of worrying events. Keep the evenings as normal as possible. Get the environment ready, so it's all there and doesn't become a predictor.


T-Touch wraps can help the dog find awareness of their body, which can be disturbed by air pressure changes. If you would like to try T-Touch wraps, get an ACE bandage, and start practising using it. See the video on the Additional Resources page. Remove after 20 minutes.

If you would prefer to use a Thundershirt, make sure you condition your dog to it in a similar way to the T-Touch wrap. Thundershirts are a lot tighter, which does not suit every dog. They are, however, safe to leave the dog in. T-Touch Wraps are not - the dog must be supervised while they are on.

Talk to your vet about anxiety medication. Make sure you understand the exact effects of anything you decide to use.

Consider supplements instead of medication e.g. CBD oil, pheromone sprays and collars, Bach flower remedies, chamomile chews. Take care with aromatherapy - many oils are not safe for dogs.

Find out about local firework displays, and put them in your diary.

A photograph of a person wearing a dark hoodie and jeans, walking away from the camera on a path covered in fallen autumn leaves. A dark-colored dog is walking alongside them. The background consists of trees with yellow and orange autumn foliage.

Dogs find everything harder to deal with when their bucket is full

MANAGEMENT BEFORE, PART 2

Before fireworks happen

Prepare a comfy den, but also be prepared for your dog to prefer a different spot. Start settling them in the den in the evenings. If you use a crate, cover it with a throw or crate cover. This helps with noise and lights. You can also cover a table, if the dog likes to hide under it.

Learn and practice calm touch marker (instructions on page 11).

Learn and start to practice DMT (instructions on page 10).

Learn and practice pattern games, such as the Up/Down game (check Additional resources for a suggested video).

It is too late to do full desensitisation to sound. But you could start a positive pairing for novel sounds, e.g. Japanese drums with a yummy chew.

Start at a low volume, and turn off before the dog finishes eating.

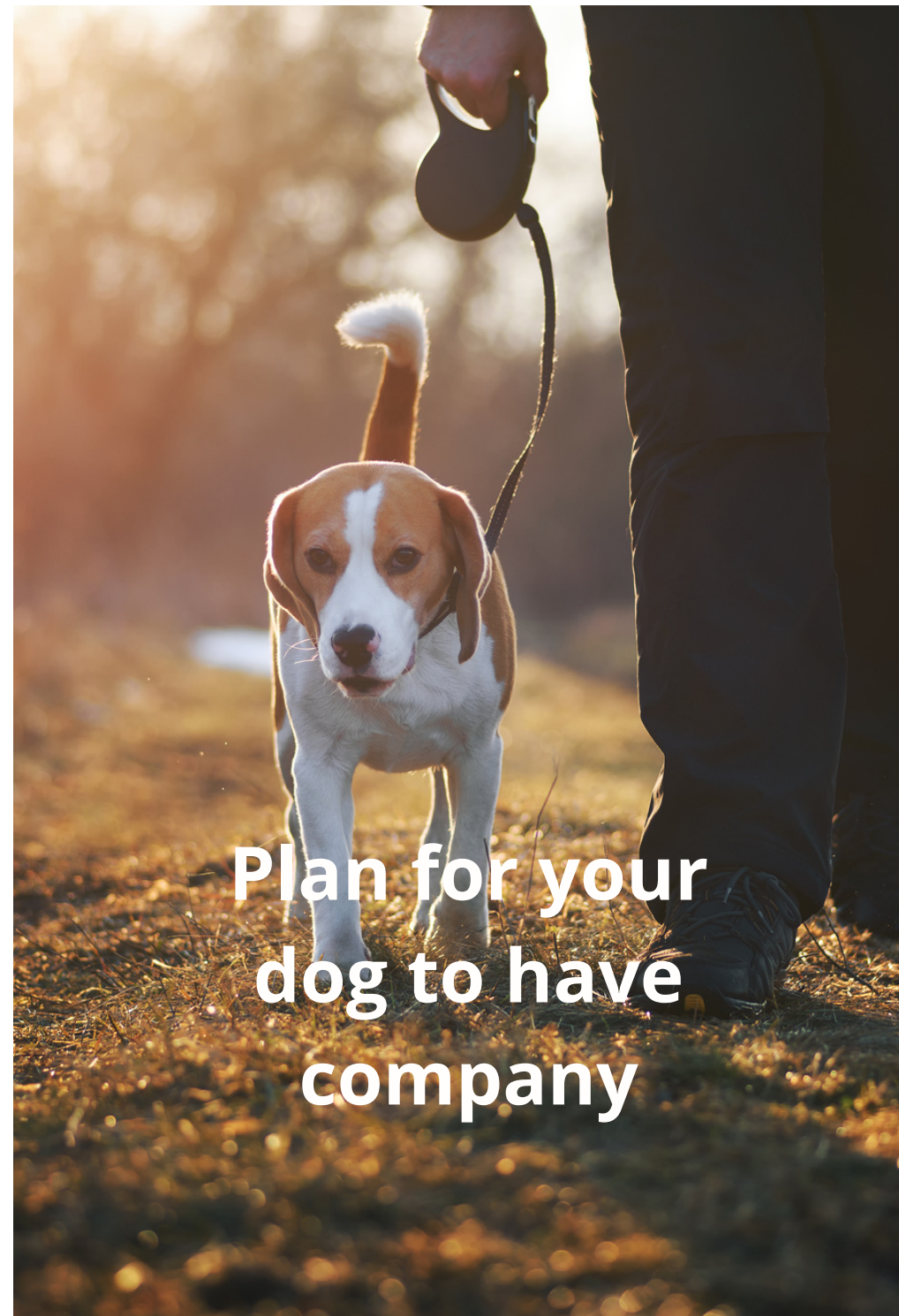
Expand the positive pairing to all novelty in the dog's life.

Prepare some tasty treats. Chews and licking are very calming e.g. split deer antlers, rawhide substitutes (NOT rawhide), natural treats like rabbit ears or deer legs, a frozen lickimat with something yummy (fish is often a winner), a frozen stuffed Kong.

Consider gut health - probiotics and prebiotics can really help with a dog's mental and physical health.

Get an electric fan (ideally a box fan), ready. You're going to point it to the corner of the room, so put it in place.

Plan for your dog to have human (and perhaps doggy) company. Don't leave them alone if at all possible.



**Plan for your
dog to have
company**

MANAGEMENT DURING

Preparation on the day

Make a note of timing if you're using medication or supplements, and make sure to give them on schedule.

Bucket management - remember that good events can pay in to the stress bucket as well as bad. Keep this period quiet and calm for your dog. No exciting outings in the daytime. See the calm triad on page 9 for help with calming activities.

Finish walks early: earlier than you think. After that, if the dog must go out, do it on lead or in a very secure garden. Fireworks can go on **late**.

Prime the family about keeping the dog safe. The dog should not have access to the front door if people are going in and out. Lock any gates. No walks after dark. This applies even to dogs who are not currently scared of fireworks - they can be massively upset if a firework goes off near them.

Feed early - ideally before dark.

Make sure windows are closed, curtains drawn, lights on in the area you expect your dog to stay. Update this expectation as time goes on.

Get some tasty treats ready!



**Finish walks
earlier than
you think you
need to**

MANAGEMENT DURING

On the night, before the fireworks begin

Get music/TV on early. There are various theories about what works best. Japanese drums, reggae, or classical (classic fm is nice) may help. Not heavy metal, which is sad! Whatever you use, don't play it too loud. It's a distraction, not drowning out the sounds.

Use your cross body wrap (max 20 mins at a time) or thundershirt.

Point your fan at the corner of the room and turn it on.

Make sure your dog has access to their den, but also what freedom they can safely have. Don't trap them - that can add to their stress.

Respect the dog's coping strategies. If they want to hide, allow that.

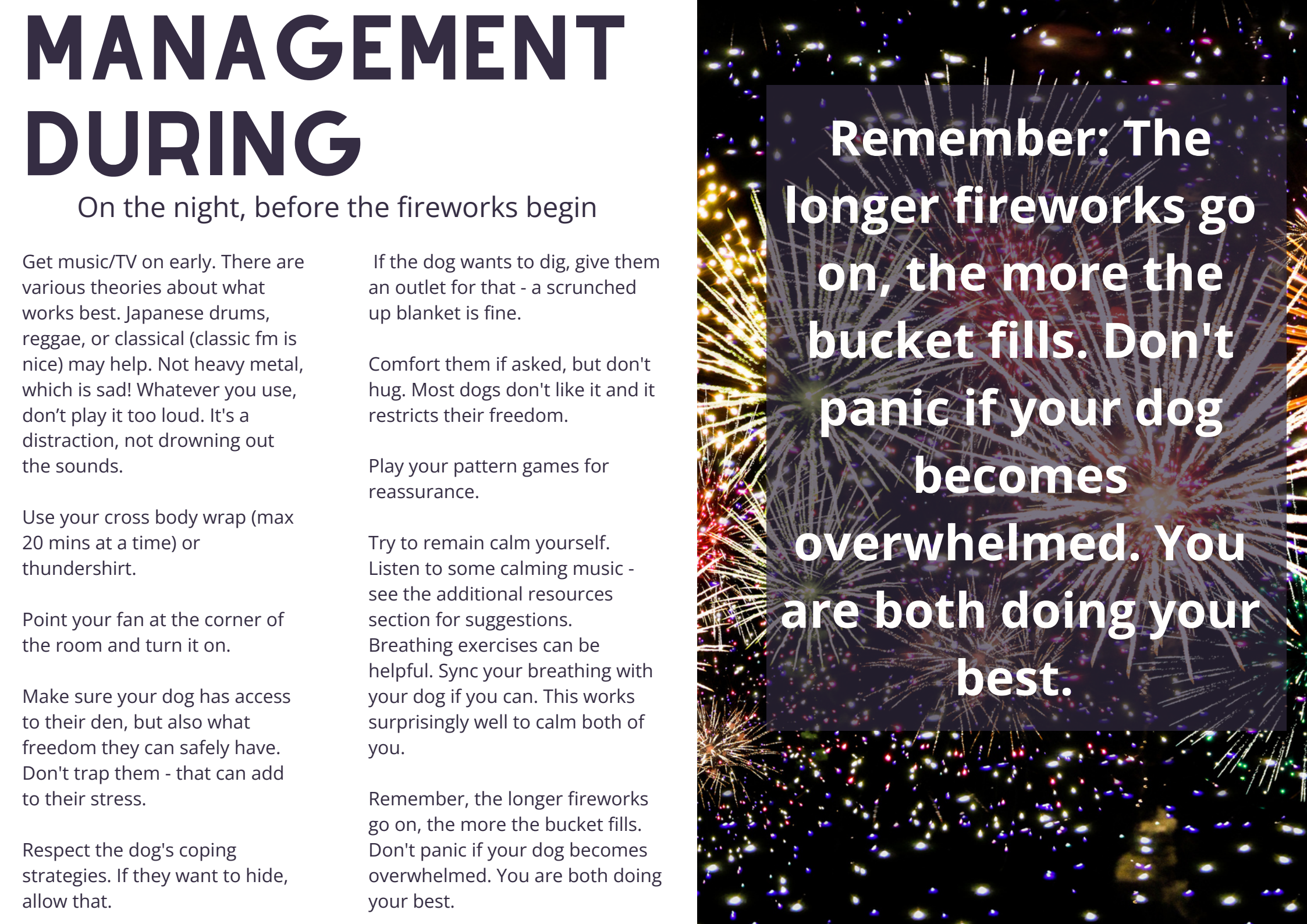
If the dog wants to dig, give them an outlet for that - a scrunched up blanket is fine.

Comfort them if asked, but don't hug. Most dogs don't like it and it restricts their freedom.

Play your pattern games for reassurance.

Try to remain calm yourself. Listen to some calming music - see the additional resources section for suggestions. Breathing exercises can be helpful. Sync your breathing with your dog if you can. This works surprisingly well to calm both of you.

Remember, the longer fireworks go on, the more the bucket fills. Don't panic if your dog becomes overwhelmed. You are both doing your best.



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MANAGEMENT AFTER

At the end of the evening

Remember to manage the stress bucket, ready for the next night.

Reflect on what helped and what didn't, so you can improve things for your dog tomorrow. Fill out a diary if you're able.

For next year

Consider putting toileting on cue.

Teach DMT, pattern games, and calm touch marker. These are all year round skills.

Learn some confidence and optimism games - contact us for more details.

Consider a calm supplement for next year (start well in advance). E.g. A-OK9 Calm can take up to 56 days to see an effect. Other options include Dorwest Herbs, or Nutripaw.

For sound desensitisation, check out the Dogs Trust resource: Sounds Scary (link below). Working through this may help, but remember that it's impossible to replicate the full fireworks experience with a recording.

A photograph of a dog, possibly a Weimaraner, resting on a bed. The dog is lying down, partially covered by a white and blue striped blanket. A yellow stuffed toy is visible next to the dog. The background is a plain white surface.

Reflect on what helped and what didn't, so you can improve things for your dog tomorrow.

BUCKETS

Emptying your dog's bucket to enable less fearful behaviour

Every dog has a bucket, and in the same way that every dog is different, every dog's bucket is different.

When our dog's bucket is full and overflowing, we tend to see a variety of unwanted behaviours. Some of them can be a little more positive than others (like getting a case of the zoomies!), but some can be catastrophic, such as biting or running away. By being mindful of the state of our dog's bucket, we can often head off those behaviours before they start.

What pays in

What empties

Excitement
Frustration
Pain
Fear
Novelty

Sniffing
Licking
Chewing
Rest
Calmness triad

THE FOUR COMPONENTS OF YOUR DOG'S BUCKET



Size of the bucket



Hole in the bucket

(Where the bucket empties, varies in size also)



Natural State of the Bucket

(The baseline some dogs have a full bucket as a baseline, where others have an emptier bucket)



What pays into the bucket?

(what fills the bucket – both positive/exciting and negative/frustrating and/or frightening)

Being aware that you can influence these factors can change the way you approach your training

CALMNESS

Using the calmness triad to help our dogs chill out

Passive calming activities

For almost all dogs, the acts of sniffing, licking and chewing are calming activities. This can include chewing bones, using a snuffle mat, having a kong or lickimat, and similar activities.

Rest

Getting enough rest and sleep is imperative. In the same way that toddlers can become very overwrought when they're tired, so can dogs! (so can adults). The average adult dog needs about 14 hours of sleep as a minimum. Puppies need even more.

Calmness protocol

Rewarding your dog for being calm will encourage your dog to continue to be calm around you. When you notice your dog is being calm and content, slip them a little treat. Don't make a big fuss about it, just a tiny reward and move on. The first few times, your dog might get up and follow you for more, but if they do, do not give them another treat. Eventually, you should be able to give them multiple treats in a day without them getting up or disturbing the calm.



DMT

Distraction, mark, treat

Distraction

This can be functionally anything in your environment that your dog pays any attention to. A leaf in the wind, another dog... or a firework!

Mark

This is the signal to your dog that something good is about to happen. It can be a word, a sound, or even a sign for a deaf dog. The important thing is that it's the same every time, and that it is calm enough not to fill your dogs bucket.

Treat

This is the reward you give to your dog for paying attention to you/the mark, and not the thing that was distracting them in the environment. When you first start out doing DMT, using a very high value reward is recommended. It is best to use food for the reward! if your dog isn't a foodie, it might take some time to find something that works, but food really is better than a toy or fuss because it fills a dogs bucket much less.

Try to deliver the treat as calmly as possible - the aim of the game is for everyone to stay cool, calm and collected.



CALM TOUCH MARKER

Have some fairly low-value food or treats about your person - in a pocket or treat pouch.

Look out for your dog being settled and calm. Sit down near them, and wait for them to re-settle if need be.

Choose a spot on the dog for a calm stroke - the shoulder or hip is good. Do one stroke, then calmly feed a piece of food. Wait for a re-settle, then repeat several times.

The idea is to capture that calm feeling for your dog, and associate it with the stroke in a good way. Then you can begin to use it to help them feel calmer when they are stressed.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Things we think might be helpful to you

[The Up/Down game, by Lesley McDevitt and Michelle Stern](#)

[Calmness diary, for you to keep track of what calming activities you've done with your dog](#)

[A bucket diary, to track what is contributing to the fullness of your dog's bucket](#)

[A super in-depth guide to DMT](#)

[The Dogs Trust: Sounds Scary](#)

[Weightless by Marconi Union: 10 hours of calming music](#)

[T-Touch Wraps and Thundershirts - a video by Heart Dog, with Janet Finley and Michelle Dart](#)



ABOUT SKYHARDT

Skyhardt dog training is run by Kate Keen and Deanna Midnight, who became friends in 2015 whilst running conventions together. Dee got a dog in 2017, and started out learning how to train him to be an assistance dog. Kate got a husky shortly after in 2018, because she didn't think her life had enough chaos in it. They've both been learning and training together since, getting their first qualifications in 2019, beginning work with clients in 2020, and continuing their education and practice constantly since.

Pay what you feel:

If you'd like to support Kate and Dee, and make more sessions and ebooks like this one possible, please donate, and support us on social media.

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