

# Helping Your Dog Through Spooky Season: Exposure Training for Halloween Decorations

Halloween is a fun and festive time of year, but for our dogs, those spooky inflatables, glowing skeletons, and motion-activated witches can be overwhelming. Instead of avoiding decorations altogether—or forcing your dog to “just deal with it”—you can help them build confidence with a method called exposure training. Here’s how to do it safely and effectively:

# Don't Force Interaction, but Don't Encourage Avoidance

If your dog seems nervous around a decoration, don't drag them closer, but also don't let them run away completely. Allowing them to flee reinforces the idea that the object is truly scary. Instead, give them space at a comfortable distance where they can observe calmly.



## Use Treats and Work at your Dogs Pace

High-value treats are your best tool. When your dog notices the decoration, reward them for calm behavior. If they seem relaxed, take a small step closer, reward again, and repeat. Progress may be slow, and that's okay—let your dog set the pace.

# Gradually Decrease the Distance

Exposure training works best in baby steps. As your dog shows comfort, move a little closer to the decoration, rewarding calm behavior each time. Over multiple sessions, your dog will learn the “scary” object isn’t a threat.

# Don't Coddle their Fear

It's natural to want to comfort your dog with a high-pitched, soothing voice, but this can actually backfire. Dogs pick up on our tone and body language. If you sound worried, they'll believe there's something to fear. Instead, stay calm, neutral, and confident.





# Never Intentionally Scare your Dog

It might be tempting to see how your pup reacts to a cackling witch or a jumping spider, but intentionally startling them can undo progress and create long-term fear. Keep training positive and predictable.



## Ask for a Known Command near the Decoration

One great way to build confidence is to give your dog something familiar to do near the spooky object. Ask for a simple command they know well, like *Place*, *Sit/Down* or *Heel*. When they can focus on the command instead of the decoration—and you reward them for it—they'll gain trust in you and learn they can succeed in that situation.

# Spooky Season Success

Exposure training around Halloween decorations is all about patience, positivity, and consistency. By not forcing interaction, rewarding calm behavior, and keeping your own energy confident, you'll help your dog feel more secure during the spookiest season of the year.



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