



FIREWORK SAFETY FOR PETS

- 1) A few months before the event, start a behaviour programme.
- 2) Start any supplements or pheromones, eg. DAP plug-in or spray.
- 3) Build a den or 'safe place' for your pet.
- 4) Update identification, collar tag and microchip.
- 5) Walk your dog during the day in daylight; increase game and mental stimulation throughout the day.
- 6) Once in the house, shut all windows, doors and cat flaps.
- 7) Provide extra litter trays for cats.
- 8) Shut curtains and switch on the television or radio to dull the noise.
- 9) Don't leave your cat or dog alone; they will be more comfortable with you present.
- 10) Let your pet hide in their 'safe place'.
- 11) Don't react to the fireworks.
- 12) Play with a toy if your cat or dog will join in, but do not force it.
- 13) Ignore any unusual behaviour, such as panting, shaking and whining, unless they come to you for reassurance. Give them affection but no



more than usual; overcompensating could make it worse, as cats and dogs pick up on their owner's apprehension.

14) Provide distractions, eg. new toys or treats.

15) Do not punish, get angry or frustrated.

16) Be prepared and patient.

NOISE PHOBIAS

Noise phobias are common in cats and even more common in dogs. These can be triggered by fireworks, thunder or the sound of gunshots. A lot of distress can be avoided or at least reduced if we think ahead and begin the desensitisation process before the event.

Some dogs are so badly affected by noise phobias that they are unable to function during and after a firework display or thunderstorm. Many noise phobic dogs adopt self-management strategies in order to cope. These can include trying to escape; digging at carpets and doors, hiding in a dark den-like space and/or pacing the floors.

These triggers can also cause excessive panting, dilation of the pupils, an elevated heart rate, loss of appetite, whimpering, trembling, drooling, barking, urinating and defecating.

Unfortunately, just one noisy celebration can turn a dog into a quivering wreck.

Fireworks are easier to deal with as we can predict and prepare in advance; however, dogs will know a storm is coming well before we do.

Conditioning a dog to feel differently about the sound of fireworks can be achieved by gradually exposing them to audio recordings of fireworks at a low volume.

If the dog appears relaxed, play its favourite game or feed it its favourite treat. Allow the dog to play and relax in the presence of the sound for ten minutes, taking a break of five minutes in order to prevent the dog



becoming bored, and repeat the process. This time, slowly increase the volume. If the dog shows any signs of stress, go back to low-level volume.

The objective of noise desensitisation is to gradually expose the dog to increasingly louder sounds over a period of time, with progress determined by the dog's reaction. Going too fast could serve to make the dog more frightened.

Some dogs will respond to the above therapies, but will panic at the real thing. For these dogs, we may need to manage the situation instead, eg. provide a safe bolt hole for the dog, or play the radio to mask some of the sound.

The owner should stay present and be there to offer reassurance. This won't reinforce the fear; it will help the dog as long as the owner remains calm.

An increase in the amount of physical and mental exertion on days where the fear response is expected to occur, eg. Bonfire Night or New Year's Eve, can help to tire and relax the dog physically and mentally. This also produces serotonin, which can act as a natural sedative.

OTHER HELPFUL SUGGESTIONS

'SOUND SCARY' CD

A behavioural therapy pack for dogs with sound phobias includes sounds of fireworks, thunder, rain, hail and gunshots.

PHEROMONES (DOGS)

Dog-appeasing pheremone. DAP is a naturally occurring pheromone which was initially extracted from lactating bitches. DAP has been shown to support both puppies and adult dogs during stressful situations. DAP invokes a calm and reassured mood.

DAP comes in spray, collar, plug-in or tablet form. The tablets need to be given two hours before the event. The plug-in should be used 24 hours before, and will last up to four weeks.

FELIWAY (CATS)

When a cat feels happy and relaxed in their environment, they will rub their faces against objects and furniture. When they do this, they leave a facial pheromone which tells your cat that the area is familiar and safe. Feliway is a synthetic copy of this pheromone, and is scientifically proven to help prevent or reduce stress-related behaviours.

Feliway comes in plug-in diffuser or spray form. The diffuser should be plugged in two to three days before the stressful event, and will last up to four weeks.



ZYLKENE

Zylkene is a natural product derived from cows' milk, clinically proven to help both cats and dogs manage stress and facilitate adaptation to change. This needs to be started at least two days before the event.

DIAZAPAM OR XANAX

Both are available from your vet following a consultation.

Remember, every dog should be treated as an individual, as they all react differently.

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