



ANIMAL ANTICS

HOW TO HELP YOUR PET SURVIVE FIREWORKS THINK AHEAD ... PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN CURE

During high levels of stress pets can be very unpredictable. They also become unable to take account of their own personal safety and may panic. Therefore, it is your responsibility to look after their safety needs. Always make sure your pet is wearing an identity tag and are microchipped to ensure it can be returned if it escapes and becomes lost.

*** During the firework season, try to stay with your animal whenever possible ***

Basic Precautions:

Dogs

Exercise your dog during the day and never walk your dog when fireworks are being let off. Do make sure, where possible, that he has been to the toilet before a firework display begins. Keep your dog indoors, close the curtains and play music (moderately loud rhythmic music with a good beat) to drown out the noise. Let your dog hide if he wants to take refuge under furniture or in a corner. You could make your dog a "den". Make it a fun place to be and go there for cuddles, special treats or biscuits. Place lots of blankets, an old duvet or an eiderdown for digging and burrowing in. An old, unwashed item of your clothing in the den also acts as a comforter. Encourage your dog to use his den regularly. Have a water bowl in the den. Agitated dogs pant and so become thirsty.

If you know that a firework display is due on a particular evening, feed your pet a meal rich in carbohydrate (e.g. pasta, rice or mashed potato) with added vitamin B6 mid to late afternoon (unless prone to diarrhoea). This helps the animal feel sleepy and calmer.

If your dog appears frightened do not cuddle or talk soothingly to him. Equally, do not get cross with him. Your dog must not think that you are the only one to help him when frightened, as you are not always going to be there. Try and totally ignore your dog if he becomes anxious (this is the hardest one!). Even looking at your dog is rewarding him. Don't pay any attention to fear that seems to occur without reason. Wait for your pet to recover and then give him all the attention and praise you want to. Act in a happy, upbeat manner to show your dog that you are not scared. If your dog is only slightly agitated, try and get him to play games. The presence of a dog unafraid of loud noises will often help your dog.

Cats

As with dogs, keep your cat indoors (make sure the cat flap is locked). Close all windows and curtains. Switch on music or the TV to drown out the noise. Leave your cat to take refuge, do not try to tempt it out as this could cause more stress.

Small Animals

Rabbits, guinea pigs and other small animals living outside should not be forgotten. Bring them indoors or into an outhouse/garden shed. Provide extra bedding for them to burrow and feel safer. Place a blanket over the front of the cage to shut out flashing lights and block out noise (make sure there is still an air flow).

Horses

Horses often bolt from firework noise and become injured. Always make sure horses, ponies and donkeys are kept in their usual environment and, if possible, stabled while fireworks are being let off.

Should your pet be of a sensitive disposition, or have known bad reactions to fireworks, then the following section may provide some assistance:

Diffusers/Bach Flower & Herbal Remedies/Ear Plugs/Behavioural CD's/Sedatives:

- Dog Appeasing Pheromone D.A.P. is the analogue of the natural dog pheromone released by lactating bitches to reassure and calm their offspring. This enhances the attachment between the puppy and its mother and conveys signals of well-being. The diffuser should be plugged into the room where the pet spends most time and switched on 24 hours a day for about 2 weeks prior to the fireworks. Feliway is a feline pheromone product, which reproduces the pacifying properties of cat facial pheromones, creating a state of well-being and calmness. Both products are also available in a spray (available from vets, pet shops or on-line).
- Therapies such as Bach's Rescue or Recovery Remedy is a combination of five flower remedies specifically used in emergency situations with the aim being to calm and reassure during stressful times, which drain the body's resources. Herbal remedies such as Valerian is well known for its calming and sedative qualities. It is a remedy that can be slow to act and works best if started a few days before a stressful event. Skullcap is another herbal sedative that is often combined with Valerian to calm and relieve anxiety and fear without drowsiness (available from pharmacists or health food shops).
- Some dogs can tolerate ear plugs. These can be purchased or made out of rolls of wrung out, damp cotton wool. However, take care to make sure you don't push them down too far into your dog's ear, and remember to remove them afterwards! Care must be taken that the ear plug is not so thin that it falls out, or so fat it hurts when you put it in (available from vets, pet shops or on-line).
- A behavioural CD, which simulates the random and unpredictable noises of fireworks. It should be played several weeks prior to the firework season, gradually building up the volume and length of time played in order to condition the pets by reducing their fear by desensitising them (available from vets, pet shops or on-line).
- For the minority of pets that are particularly sensitive, a sedative could help. Sedatives are prescription drugs, so your veterinary practitioner will need to give your pet a full health check before issuing any. These are normally administered a few days before or on the day of a firework display (available from vets only).

Domestic pets, farm animals and wildlife can all suffer as a result of the noise created by loud fireworks. Thousands of calls are received by the RSPCA each year on firework related incidents. In 2005 the RSPCA received an 82% increase in the number of calls about distressed and injured animals on and around Bonfire night. If you see an animal in need of help call the RSPCA's cruelty and advice line on 0870 55 55 999.

*** Remember, NEVER let off fireworks near animals ***

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01892 771498 / 07974 728967
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