

First Aid for Fireworks

As nights draw in, we look forward to the autumn fun of events like Halloween and Bonfire Night. Early evenings are perfect for these occasions but can be a nightmare for our dogs.

There are many products and training methods available which can help if you are worried about your dog at this time of year.

Safety First

By law your pet should be microchipped (and your details up to date), in case they take fright and bolt. Your dog should also wear a collar and ID tag. Keep pets inside overnight.

Tire them out

Taking your dog for a good walk and/or playing boisterous games during daylight hours will ensure they are ready to settle down by nightfall.

Give your dog a good meal before nightfall to give a contented, full tummy.

Provide a den

Animals generally feel more secure in small spaces. If you cover the "den" it may help muffle the noise, as does closing curtains and keeping the television or radio on. This den should be set up at least 2-3 weeks before the start of the fireworks and should be available for them at all times whether or not you are present.

Use of Adaptil

This is a calming pheromone product that helps to reduce anxiety. Among other ways, it can be used to help in the same area as the den to enhance the 'safe' feeling of that area.

Just act normal!

Although we do need to comfort our pets when they are fearful, it is important not to inadvertently encourage attention seeking behaviour. The best time to praise them is when they are being calm and relaxed.

Medication is available.

Finally, some pets simply cannot cope and may need medication. If you feel your animal may be one of these cases then give us a ring to discuss this.

This questionnaire is a very useful one to determine how severely your pet is affected:

www.adaptil.com/uk/Blog/Is-my-dog-scared-of-fireworks

We may need them to come in for an appointment to check them over if they do need medication, and decide which ones are most appropriate for them.

On the day preparation

- Walk your dog earlier in the day before fireworks are likely to start.
- Once all your pets are inside, make sure all windows, doors and cat flaps are securely closed. This will reduce the chances of your pet bolting/running off.
- Provide extra litter trays for cats if they are not used to being confined to the house and ensure they are toilet trained in advance.
- Always keep cats and dogs inside the house when fireworks are being let off. Do not take your dog to a fireworks display!
- Pull the curtains and switch on the TV or radio to dull the noise from the fireworks.
- Try not to leave your pets by themselves while the fireworks are going off. Pets will be more relaxed when they have familiar faces around.
- Don't force your pets to come to you, especially if they are in their hiding place or den.
- Don't react to the fireworks yourself. Play with a toy and see if your pet wants to join in, but don't force them.
- Ignore unusual behaviour, such as panting, shaking or whining, unless they come to you first for reassurance. Give them affection, but no more than usual. Pets will often pick up on their owner's worry and overcompensating could make things worse.
- Provide distractions, for example new toys or treats.
- DO NOT punish or get frustrated with your pet! This will only make them more uneasy.
- Use recommended medications from your vets if required.

Long Term Management

In the long term, we recommend a Desensitisation programme, starting several months in advance. Done correctly, it normalises the scary sounds for your pet and means that they don't react to the real thing.

Left unmanaged, these behaviours can get worse over time. It can also spread to a response to other unexpected loud noises such as door slamming or thunder.

Sound Desensitisation is one of the most effective methods available to produce long term positive results. The training is similar to programmes that police dogs and horses go through before being put into public work situations. It works by gradually exposing your pet to a tiny amount of sound and then increasing it slowly over time. It can be a long process, but it is worth it in the end.