

## Fireworks frighten animals

Fireworks are enjoyed year-round by people but can be a source of fear for many animals.

It doesn't have to be that way though, so don't ignore the problem. Seek advice from your vet who will if necessary; be able to refer you to a professional clinical animal behaviourist. You can also follow our top tips to make firework celebrations less frightening for your pet.

### Keeping cats and dogs secure

- Make sure your dog or cat always has somewhere to hide if he or she wants to and has access to this place at all times. For example this could be under some furniture or in a cupboard.
- During firework seasons, walk dogs during daylight hours and keep cats and dogs indoors when fireworks are likely to be set off.
- At nightfall close windows and curtains and put on music to mask and muffle the sound of fireworks.
- If your pet shows any signs of fear try to ignore their behaviour. Leave them alone unless they are likely to harm themselves.
- Never punish or fuss over your pet when it's scared as this will only make things worse in the long run.
- Make sure your cat or dog is always kept in a safe and secure environment and can't escape if there's a sudden noise. Have your pet microchipped in case they do escape.

### Just for dogs – before the firework season starts

Planning ahead can help your dog cope with the firework season.

Talk to your vet about pheromone diffusers. These disperse calming chemicals into the room and may be a good option for your dog, in some cases your vet may even prescribe medication. If either of these options is used they should be used in conjunction with behavioural therapy. We would recommend asking your vet to refer you to a clinical animal behaviourist or using the 'Sounds Scary' therapy pack ([www.soundtherapy4pets.co.uk](http://www.soundtherapy4pets.co.uk)).

Before the firework season starts provide your dog with a doggy safe haven, this should be a quiet area so choose one of the quietest rooms in your home. It should be a place where the animal feels it is in control, so don't interfere with it when it's in that area. Train your dog to associate the area with positive experiences eg. by leaving toys there but not imposing yourself at any time. Use a variety of toys and swap them regularly, putting them away when not in use so that your dog doesn't become bored with them. With time your dog can learn that this place is safe and enjoyable. So when fireworks happen it may choose to go here because it knows that when it is here, no harm will come to it and so it's more able to cope. It is important that your dog has access to its doggy safe haven at all times even when you're not at home.

### **Just for dogs – when the fireworks start**

- Close any windows and black out the 'doggy play area' to remove any extra problems caused by flashing lights.
- Each evening before the fireworks begin, move your dog to the play area and provide toys and other things that they enjoy. Make sure that there are things for you to do too so that your dog isn't left alone.
- Ignore the firework noises yourself. Play with a toy to see if your dog wants to join in, but don't force them to play.
- If you know a dog that isn't scared by noises and which gets on well with your dog, then keeping the two together during the evenings may help your dog to realise that there's no need to be afraid.

### **Sounds Scary – for dogs**

In the long term your dog needs to learn to be less afraid of loud noises. With proper treatment this is possible so that the next firework season will be less stressful for you and your dog.

We recommend **Sounds Scary**, an easy to follow therapy pack for dogs which includes a specially made set of high quality sound recordings and an easy to follow guide. The amount of training needed will vary from dog to dog so owners should start training with the Sounds Scary pack well in advance of firework seasons. Visit Sound Therapy 4 Pets ([www.soundtherapy4pets.co.uk](http://www.soundtherapy4pets.co.uk)) for more information.

## **Just for cats**

- Make sure your cat has somewhere to hide if it wants to. For example this may be under some furniture or in a quiet corner.
- Don't try and tempt your cat out as this will cause it to become more stressed.

## **Don't forget small animals**

- If your pets live outside, partly cover cages, pens and aviaries with blankets so that one area is well sound-proofed. Make sure that your pet is still able to look out.
- Provide lots of extra bedding so your pet has something to burrow in.

*Acknowledgement for this information is made to Prof Daniel Mills.*