



Firework advice

With the winter nights drawing in, and Guy Fawkes night just around the corner many pet owners wait with nervous anticipation for the first fireworks to be set off.



Cats are naturally nervous and shy creatures and for the most part will try and hole up somewhere until the barrage is over. Additionally many domestic dogs are also totally unfazed by the flashes and crashes outside the house. For those that are firework phobic though, their worst nightmare is repeated night after night like a hellish version of Groundhog Day.

Whilst it is probably unrealistic to condition a sound phobic dog to ignore fireworks, there are several coping strategies that owners can put in place which will allow their pet dog to survive the firework season.

DO

- Recognise at an early age a puppy that may be startled/scared by loud noises and seek advice before this becomes a conditioned response
- Keep doors, windows and cat flaps closed to keep your pets in and out of harms way.
- Draw the curtains and turn up music or a television BEFORE the fireworks start that evening
- Allow your dog to have a bolt hole where they can hide for the duration of the event
- Try and act normally yourself as if nothing is happening
- If your dog becomes anxious or stressed, IGNORE THEM TOTALLY as any interaction at this stage will almost certainly reinforce negative associations with fireworks

DO NOT

- Walk your dog whilst fireworks are being let off.
- Try to make your pet confront their fears by taking them outside 'to show them nothing is wrong'
- Make an extra fuss of your pet if they seem anxious or distressed (often shown by excessive panting or yawning). This just serves to reinforce the negative associations with fireworks and make the situation worse for future events.

Traditionally pet owners used to traipse along to their veterinarian for a handout of yellow sedative pills (ACP or acepromazine) which would appear to make their dogs drowsy and less reactive to outside stimuli. Unfortunately it has now been shown that these sedatives were actually making the situation worse by suppressing the animal's ability to react to stimuli in an appropriate way and are now contraindicated for sound phobia.



There are a couple of quite effective natural remedies including a calming pheromone diffuser and collar; and a natural herbal sedative. Additionally a CD is available with recordings of many different noises which may cause sound phobia in dogs. Used correctly, this CD can help desensitise dogs to firework phobia although the protocol must be started well in advance of the anticipated problem.