

# Fireworks & your pets

A fear of fireworks is quite common amongst many dogs and cats. This leaflet has some products & tips to help you and your pet through the firework season, as recommended by our Behaviour Team.

## Top tips for firework nights

Make sure your cats are kept in after dusk and provide them with a litter tray to use indoors.

For rabbits - preferably bring them indoors. Otherwise cover outdoor hutches with a heavy blanket, leaving a small gap for them to peek through if they want to.

If your pet would like to hide, then let them. Don't try and coax them out. Make their chosen hidey-hole nice and comfortable (*see later*) and greet them normally when they come out of their own accord.

Pets often take their cues from you - so don't react to fireworks yourself. Act as though you cannot hear anything!

If they come to you for a cuddle, that's OK. Just don't make more of a fuss than you normally would. Again, act like it is a normal evening.

Distractions can also help. Provide a chew toy, bone, activity ball or Kong *before* fireworks start. Dogs can also be distracted with a training session - keep the commands simple and it can help to keep their focus on you instead of the fireworks.

## Extra tips

### Crates or Dens

A crate can be very beneficial for dogs, creating a safe and cosy 'den' where they can hide when feeling insecure or worried. It is important to make a crate cosy by adding plenty of bedding; many dogs also like to have a blanket over the top so that it is dark and safe. Always leave the door open and never send your dog into their crate as a punishment or shut them in it. Give plenty of praise when your dog goes into their crate and create a positive association with it by feeding meals, treats and giving toys inside the crate.

Crate training must begin several days, or even weeks before fireworks season to ensure a strong positive association. Please speak to a behaviourist before doing any crate training if you are unsure as it is crucial that your dog sees the crate as a positive and safe place to be.

Cats also often choose safe, dark places and may appreciate a cosy den in an area where they usually like to hide (for example, under the bed or in a cupboard). Set this up several days before fireworks season and show them the den by throwing a few tasty treats in and around it. Never force or push your cat into the den and remember that your cat may simply choose to never go in it.

### Other sounds

Playing music or leaving a radio or television on will help to drown out the sound of the fireworks. Relaxing classical music tends to be particularly good and is what we use in the kennels at the Home.

### Specialist CDs

There are several CDs available which are designed to desensitise animals to noises such as fireworks and thunder. If you choose to try this, desensitisation must begin several months prior to firework season and be done extremely carefully. The CD must be played at a volume low enough that the animal does not react to the sounds and the volume then very gradually increased over a period of weeks and months.

### Sedatives

Always consult a behaviourist before using any sedatives as they should only be used as a last resort.

## Products that can help animals to cope with a fear of fireworks

### D.A.P. for Dogs

D.A.P. is a synthetic copy of a pheromone that is released by a mother dog when she has puppies, designed to reduce stress levels and calm dogs down. It comes in three forms; a plug-in diffuser, a collar and a spray. As the positive effect from the spray only lasts about two hours, they are not suitable for helping with firework fear.

**D.A.P. collar:** The collar lasts approximately four weeks and can take several days to take effect so fit the collar three to four days before fireworks may start and to leave it on continuously for the next few weeks.

**D.A.P. plug in:** The plug in also lasts approximately four weeks and can take several days to take effect. It needs to be plugged into the socket closest to where your dog spends the majority of its time and must be left on continuously from three to four days before fireworks are likely to start, and then just keep it plugged in and on.

### Feliway for Cats

Feliway mimics the facial pheromone that cats use to mark their territory. It helps cats to feel safe and secure and comes as both a spray and a plug in diffuser. Similar to D.A.P., the effects of the spray only last around two hours and it is therefore not suitable for helping cats to cope with firework fear.

The diffuser needs to be plugged into the socket closest to where your cat spends the majority of its time and must be left on continuously from three to four days before fireworks are likely to start, and then keep it on throughout the rest of the fireworks season.

### Valerian

The smell of this herb helps to relax and sooth anxiety in dogs and cats. Sew dried valerian herb into a small cotton pouch and allow your pet to sniff.

**Do not let them play with the bag, and keep it safe out of reach when you are not there.**

We have found this herb very useful in our kennel environment and often have small pouches for sale in our shop, sewn by volunteers.

### Rescue remedy

Rescue remedy is a liquid herbal remedy to help relax cats and dogs. Place two to three drops of Rescue Remedy in approximately 500ml of water. You must also offer a bowl of plain water as it allows your pet to choose whether or not to drink it.

### Thundershirts

Thundershirts are close fitting coats which are designed to provide gentle pressure across the body, giving animals a feeling of security and comfort. They are sold in a variety of sizes to fit both cats and dogs.

Fit just before during fireworks. Wrap the torso straps around your pet first and then the chest strap, making sure that you can comfortably fit one finger between the coat and your dog or cat. The coat needs to be a snug fit, but not tight or restrictive.

The coat may be worn for several hours at a time during fireworks, but be sure to remove it once the fireworks have ended so that the soothing effect of the coat is maintained.

If your pet wears the coat for extended periods, they are less likely to feel comforted in stressful situations.