

FIREWORK FEARS AND YOUR PET – Advice from Tweed House

Bonfire Night is something most of us enjoy but unfortunately, a large percentage of our pets will find fireworks very frightening. Animals have much better senses than we do meaning every flash or bang they hear can be extremely unsettling. You may notice your pet shaking, vocalising more than usual, soiling in the house, panting or refusing to eat – distressing for them and upsetting for us too! This info sheet contains advice on how to fight those fears at this time of year.

Creating a ‘safe space’

So how can you help your furry friend get through the noise of Bonfire Night? One of the best things you can do is stay with them and ensure they have a safe hiding place in a favoured spot of the house. This could just be a cardboard box or a crate with a blanket draped over the top. If you have a cat, remember they are more comfortable high up so bear that in mind when thinking about where to put their hiding place. Fill the den with toys and treats and always make sure they can escape if they want to - shutting your pet away will only heighten their anxiety.

Dogs respond well to lots of praise so playing reward-based games will help to keep them distracted from the noise outside - this goes for cats too! Give your pet attention should they require it, contrary to popular belief this doesn't reinforce their fears, it will simply comfort them. However, if your pet is quite happy hiding away, then leave them to it rather than coaxing them out, they may feel safer where they are.

Plug in diffusers and sprays such as Adaptil for dogs and Feliway for cats can help alleviate anxiety. They contain pheromones that comfort cats and dogs to help them cope with their fears. Plug them in a few days before fireworks are expected and ensure they're switched on continually throughout firework season. The sprays can be used on your pet's bedding or on a bandana around their collar for added reassurance.

Top tips

- Only walk your dog outside at times when he won't be exposed to fireworks and let him outside to toilet before night falls. Avoid letting him off the lead as he may run off.
- Make sure your cat is indoors before it gets dark, tempt them inside with treats and ensure all windows and doors are secured to keep them inside and to keep noise out. If your cat is not used to staying indoors begin to get them used to it in the run up to firework season.
- Close your curtains and leave the TV or radio on at a reasonable volume to disguise the sound of fireworks.
- Make sure your dogs and cats are microchipped and have identification tags on them. If they go missing during the fireworks, they will be far more likely to be returned to you with the correct identification.
- Feeding your dog a high-carbohydrate meal like pasta or rice in the late afternoon will make them sleepier in the evening once the fireworks begin.

Medication

A vet may be able to prescribe medication for pets with particularly severe noise phobias and anxiety. However, this isn't a 'quick fix' and won't stop the cycle of fear as your pet will still be aware of what's going on around them, so it's important to still use the tips above as well. If you have any concerns and would like advice, please book an appointment with one of our vets.

Overcoming fear in the long run

If your pet is very frightened by fireworks or loud noises in general it may be time to consider a long term solution to fix the issue. Usually if these behaviours are left untreated they will get worse each year so it's important to tackle the problem early. Sound desensitisation is highly recommended to help animals get over fears of particular noises. This works by slowly introducing your pet to sounds they may find frightening and increasing their exposure to it over time until they no longer react to it. This process can take months but usually gains positive results. For more information have a look at the Sounds Scary section on the Dogs Trust website or the International Cat Care website – great resources for behaviour issues.

If you have any questions about your pet during firework season don't hesitate to speak to one of our team today on 0113 2505522 or call into one of our practices.

