

# Firework Preparation

It's coming up to the time of the year for Fireworks, fun for us but very scary for animals. Dog's senses are very acute and complex compared to humans. It is not just about the sound of the firework which dogs can hear from much further away than we can, they can smell the gunpowder in the air, the bang , flash , whoosh and screech is sudden , unexpected and really scary for many dogs .

There are several signs seen in the dog's behaviour which indicate they are stressed and anxious and will need help to cope with fireworks. Some of these signs you may already have noticed on a previous bonfire night. Panting excessively, trembling , restless and unable to settle down even in the places where the dog usually lies down, continuous barking or whining, cowering, trying to run away and hiding behind or under furniture, a sudden case of diarrhoea and won't eat even a tasty treat. All very distressing, but there are several things you can do that will help to keep your dog calm and safe. It is best to prepare a few weeks in advance as people often let off fireworks before November 5<sup>th</sup>.

It is important to give your dog a place to hide; most dogs seem to find their own place where they feel safe when they are worried. Make this place comfortable with blankets which smell familiar. If the safe place is a crate cover it with a blanket to muffle the sound and dim the flashes. Make the safe place like a den. A stuffed Kong or favourite toy can be placed inside as this will have a positive association to help calm the dog. Mask the noise of the fireworks by having the TV on and make sure the curtains are closed to reduce the flashes which seem very bright to a dog. Dogs (and Cats) should be kept indoors when fireworks are let off. Do not leave the dog in the garden on his own in case the sudden explosion of a firework panics him. He may escape and run away. Take the dog for his walk during daylight as fireworks are less likely to be set off before it gets dark. If you can't do this and even in daylight when taking him out keep him on a lead or long line to keep him safe. A natural mistake that can be made is by unintentional rewarding the dog's fearful behaviour by going to him and over petting, hugging, sympathetically speaking to him etc (as you would a frightened child). Unfortunately this can communicate to the dog that the sound of fireworks is indeed a dangerous situation that even the owner fears.

Although the dog will probably be more relaxed if you are around, it is better to act very matter-of-fact and ignore the dog's fearful behaviour, but just make sure you have put in place all the things that will help the dog to cope with this unusual, unpredictable noisy time.

There is a variety of different products available to buy which can help the dog to stay relaxed and ease the fear of fireworks. One of these the "ADAPTIL" calm range is a synthetic copy of the comforting pheromones given off by a mother dog to reassure and calm her puppies. This can be a useful addition to the pre fireworks preparations, especially if it's a pup's first bonfire night experience. Even a dog that is unaffected by the sound of gun fire can react fearfully or become highly stressed at the very different sight and sound of fireworks.

Don't wait to see if your dog reacts badly to them because by then it may be too late to really help them cope. Following the safety precautions and with a little preparation a few weeks before will really help make the time around bonfire night easier for many dogs.

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