



Fireworks Season can be such a frustrating time for owners of pets that find them frightening. It is awful seeing them absolutely terrified and feeling quite helpless. Ideally, you should start to desensitise your pet to fireworks and thunderstorms months before they happen but if you haven't done so, you can try these tips:

Helping your cats and dogs cope during fireworks

Safe den: Create a comfortable, covered space that your pet can retreat to when frightened. For cats, this could be a cardboard box with a soft, fleece blanket inside and for dogs, it could be a covered crate or a duvet behind the couch or under a table with a cover over the top.

Pheromones: Feliway and DAP products have been shown to help relax pets. These can be purchased from your vet or online.

Medication: Discuss the option of medication with your vet.

Keep pets indoors: Keep your cat shut in from before it becomes dark when you know there is a risk of fireworks being set off. Remember to lock the cat flap and shut all windows. Some cats will break through a locked cat flap so place something in front of it once they're inside. Dogs should be exercised before it is dark and if you have to take him or her out to the toilet, keep them on a lead and ensure they are wearing a proper fitting harness or collar. If frightened by a firework or thunder clap, there is a risk that they might run away.

Turn on the TV or radio and shut windows and curtains: This can help to drown out some of the noises and lights and flashes of the fireworks

Comfort your dog or cat: Some animals really want affection when they are frightened and it is okay to cuddle them. Some dogs can be distracted by play or being given something tasty to chew. Some cats might happily munch on a few treats. It really depends on your pet. If something works to make them feel safer then there is no harm in doing that for them.

Visit another parish: If you know the times of the display, take your dog for a drive away from where they can hear the fireworks and let them explore a new area or just enjoy a nice drive.

Help your small animals such as rabbits and guinea pigs cope with fireworks: The flashes and sounds of fireworks could frighten small animals so bring their hutch inside for the evening. If you notice any change in your rabbit or guinea pig such as not eating, please take them to a vet as the stress of the fireworks may affect their health.

Help your horses cope with fireworks: It depends on where your horse feels safest, some need to be stabled during fireworks and some might feel trapped in a stable and would be better in the paddock. Stay with your horses during fireworks so that you can support them if they become afraid. If possible, it may be best to move your horse to a different field or stables during the fireworks display.

Desensitisation - Training your animal to not be frightened of fireworks

This process can take months so please start it well in advance of firework season.

Do the training at a time of evening that your pet is most calm and in a room that they usually relax in.

You will need to try to replicate firework sounds in the training and this can be done by purchasing CD's with firework sounds such as CLIX Noises and Sounds CD, you can download the app called Pup School or go online YouTube for fireworks sounds or to Dog's Trust Sounds Scary which has tracks of firework sounds.

Prepare the room. Pheromones can be used to help reduce anxiety so you can use Adaptil (for dogs) or Feliway (for cats) in the room you intend to use for training. Create a lovely, comfortable den for your pet that they can relax in. Shut the windows and close curtains. Just as you should set up when you know that fireworks will be going off. Put on sounds that could help create a relaxing atmosphere such as 'Through a dog's ear' music for dogs, audio books or turn on the TV. Provide your dog with something to eat that he or she will enjoy and will last for a while. Filled kongs work nicely for this.

Training: Start the firework sounds at a volume that your pet does not find scary. That might mean that you can't hear it. Straight after the sounds have started playing give them their kong, or toy or treats or lie down with them and gently stroke them. Whatever you choose, make sure it is something that they enjoy. Repeat this every day; stay on the same volume for a few days before increasing the volume. Increase the volume very gradually. Once your pet is desensitised to one lot of sounds, start again, at a low volume, to another set of sounds. This really will be a slow, gradual process. If you try to rush it and play the sounds at a volume your pet finds scary, you are not desensitising them and you are still making them feel fearful around fireworks. It is important during a desensitisation process to avoid a fireworks event as this could undo all of your work. If there are fireworks going to be going off, speak to your vet about medication during the event or take your dog for a drive to another area where they won't hear the fireworks.