

## Coping with fireworks

by Helen, for The Dog Centre.

It's that time of year again; the clocks have gone back, the nights are drawing in, Simon has abandoned the shorts for the long trousers and then the fireworks start! Not so many years ago we dog owners would only have had to prepare ourselves for fireworks for only one or two nights a year, but nowadays we appear to have a whole fireworks season. Around 50% of dogs will react to loud noises and if not handled correctly or left unchecked this problem could progressively get worse and escalate into a phobia. Coping with a noise phobic dog can become very stressful for both dog and owner. Below I have some suggestions for easing your canine pals fear and to hopefully make for a calmer home when the banging begins:

- 🐾 As owners it is imperative that we do not reinforce negative behaviour. The most important advice is *not* to make a fuss of your dog when it is in a nervous state. As humans we instinctively have a strong urge to cuddle and comfort our dogs but your dog will interpret this as rewarding his negative emotional state, and will reinforce and maybe even escalate the problem. The best advice is to carry on as normal, if you aren't scared by the fireworks then why should your dog be.
- 🐾 Be sure that your dog is taken for his walk, has had his food and toileted before the fireworks are likely to start. At home shut the curtains and turn the TV or radio up a little louder than normal to try to muffle out the sound.
- 🐾 Dogs in the wild will naturally have dens where they can retreat or escape to in times of danger. Make sure your dog has a 'bolt hole', a den in your home where he feels safe. A dog will feel safest in a confined dark space. If your dog feels the need to retreat let him. You can make his 'den more comfortable for him; place a blanket over a cage to make it dark; place blankets in an under stairs space; let him stay under the bed if that's where he feels safe.

If you find that these methods do not work you may want to try these tried and tested products:

- 🐾 **DAP products:** There are a number of products that exploit the calming effects of a certain female pheromone which is present in the nursing mother and has a calming effect on her pups; the synthetic copy is known as dog appeasing pheromone (DAP). The DAP is available as a plug-in diffuser, a spray and a collar. The efficaciousness of the plug-in diffuser is limited in larger rooms as the pheromone can become too diffuse; check the manufacturers' guidelines when purchasing this product. The collar obviously travels with the dog and gives him a constant dosage of the pheromone which means you can use this on the dog in other situations and places

where he may become stressed. The DAP products are widely available online and in pet stores such as Pets-At-Home.

- 🐾 **Noises CD's:** There are a number of CD's and DVD's available that have recordings of some of the noisier events dogs may encounter in our human environment, which includes fireworks. The CD/DVD therapy will take from 1 to 3 months to have an effect so is no use as a last minute solution. Most CD's and DVD's will come with instructions on their use but essentially work on the principle of desensitising your dog to the noises it has become scared of. At first the noises should be barely audible to the dog and played whilst he participates in enjoyable activities such as play and eating. Gradually the noise will be increased until the dog learns to ignore them. This therapy can be used in conjunction with a DAP product.
- 🐾 **Natural Remedies:** Dorwest Herb Ltd is an online company that supply herbal remedies specifically for dogs and cats. They produce two remedies, Skullcap and Valerian tablets and Organic Valerian compound that are appropriate for calming noise phobic dogs. The Skullcap and Valerian tablets are given daily throughout the period when fireworks are expected. For times when noises are not readily anticipated a dose of Organic Valerian Compound is recommended. This compound will more quickly calm your dog without sedation.
- 🐾 **Zylkene:** This product is a food supplement. It is made from a simple protein molecule called a peptide that is naturally found in milk which has been found to have a calming effect similar to that of diazepam ("Vallium") but without the side effects. The Zylkene comes in capsule form which is sprinkled on your dog's food. It is usually given to a dog for a couple of days to calm him after a stressful episode, but is usually safe to be given for longer periods of time. You should ask your vets advice if you want to give your dog Zylken over a protracted length of time. It is available without a prescription from vets or online.

I have had experience of dogs that are nervous (rather than phobic) of fireworks. With both of my boxers, Riley and Bert, in the safety of my home I opened the curtains and we sat together watching the fireworks. I also keep Bert calm using my 'shhh' technique, please ask me about this. When I could see both dogs were settled and accepting of the fireworks noise in the house I took them both out for a walk on the lead and we stood and watched the fireworks displays from a distance. After this neither of my boys ever made a fuss about the fireworks, in fact Riley sat himself on the front of my narrowboat about 20m away from a display and calmly took it all in, though, in retrospect I think he was actually keeping an eye on the sausages cooking on the barbeque!

I hope this helps you and your dog. If you have any further questions please don't hesitate to ask [info@thedogcentre.com](mailto:info@thedogcentre.com) .