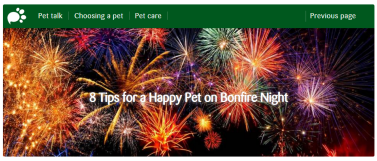


8 Tips for a Happy Pet on Bonfire Night

As bonfire night approaches, so does the feeling of anxiety about how your pet will cope with the loud noises and flashing lights. Whether this is your first bonfire night together, you remember issues from last year, or you just want to make sure you're doing everything you can, there are ways to help reduce your pet's nervousness at this time of year.

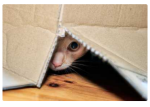
How to know if your pet is anxious

Before you decide to take any action, it's good to know what anxiety looks like in your pet. Once you know this, you can begin to manage the behaviour. A fearful state usually starts with a watchful phase where your dog or cat will be unusually alert. This is the point to step in (as we'll discuss in more detail shortly). As their fear grows, you may see one or more of the following signs of anxiety:

Typical signs of fear in a dog

- Hiding
- Pacing
- Panting
- Yawning
- Salivating
- Incontinence
- Restlessness
- Running away*
- Flattened ears
- Loss of appetite
- Tail between its legs
- Too distracted to focus

Typical signs of fear in a cat



- Hiding
- Spitting
- Hissing
- Swatting
- Biting
- Scratching
- Puffed fur and tail
- Arched back
- Tail swishing
- Frozen, no movement
- Running away*
- Flattened ears
- Incontinence
- Active anal glands
- Refusal to use the litter box

*If your pet is outdoors when the fireworks start, they may escape and run away. Ensuring your dog or cat is microchipped is a preventative measure you can take so that you don't have to suffer the agony of your pet going missing. It is compulsory under UK law to have your dog microchipped, while it is strongly advised to make sure your cat is also.

8 ways to give your pet a happy bonfire night

1. Know when fireworks can be used

Bonfire Night may be the main event, but in the UK there are three separate periods when fireworks can legally be lit. It pays to know the dates so that you can prepare your dog, cat or small pet for each one:

- 15 October to 10 November (Halloween/Bonfire Night)
- 26 to 31 December (New Year)
- Three days before Diwali (Oct/Nov) and three days before Chinese New Year (Jan/Feb)

2. Start creating positive associations

It's possible to help your dog or cat change their behaviour and reduce their fear of loud noises. This involves gradually exposing your pet to very low levels of the noises that scare them alongside a favourite treat or game. Ensure your pet is behaving normally and you can gradually increase the volume through the same process. You can buy and download sounds to help with this. If you see any signs of fear in your pet, stop immediately. You can restart the process at a volume your pet is comfortable with, once they are calm.

3. Give your pet a safe space

This is one of the most supportive things you can do for your dog or cat to reduce anxiety:

- A safe place is somewhere quiet, as far away from the bangs and lights as possible
- Watch where they go when they're frightened and use that space
- It must be safe from their perspective, not just yours
- Add familiar toys and bedding
- Ensure they have access to that place throughout firework season
- Use play and rewards to build positive associations with the safe space
- Get it established as early as possible

4. Use calming aids

There are a range of anti-anxiety products available, including ADAPTIL and FELIWAY's calming sprays, tablets, drops and diffusers which help reduce your dog or cat's anxious behaviour. If you need any further help or information on pet calming products, try reading our guide to understanding pet calming products.

Two weeks before is a good time to start introducing them to your house, and pet, in preparation for fireworks or a seasonal party.

5. Walks and curfews

Be proactive

Search online or ask your local council for a list of firework displays in your area and make sure you keep your pet indoors on those days. Start thinking about calling your cat in before dusk, as that's when the fireworks begin. A rattle of the treat box should do it!

Change your walking routine

When it's firework season (key dates above), you might want to consider changing your walking routine to make sure you're only out in daylight hours. Fireworks can be legally lit right up to 11pm (12am Bonfire Night, 1am New Year's Eve, Diwali and Chinese New Year), so get out and back early. Morning walks in the dark should be fine as fireworks can't be lit again until 7am.

6. During the fireworks

Muffle the bangs

Keep curtains and blinds closed and windows shut. Play music, turn on the TV or have a fan running in your pet's safe space to muffle the fireworks.

Distract and reassure

If your pet is showing signs of anxiety at the sound of fireworks, try and catch them before they become too upset. Look for watchful, alert behaviour and distract them with a toy or a favourite game.

7. After the fireworks

Give them space

Once the fireworks are over, let your pet come out from its safe space in its own time. A healthy treat is always a good motivator if they are a little wary.

Monitor their behaviour

For a few days after the fireworks have finished, keep an eye on how much your dog or cat is eating and drinking. For cats, monitor how much they're using their litter tray or going outside.

8. Consult an expert

If the problem persists, visit your vet for expert advice and support. It may be that a prescribed treatment or some psychological support could help reduce the fearful behaviour.

Protect your pets and neighbouring wildlife

Here's how to help your pets, and local wildlife, safe and happy around bonfire night:

Cats and dogs

- Microchip them in case they run off
- Prepare a safe place for them to hide
- Keep them indoors when the fireworks start
- Muffle sounds with TV or music
- Reassure them at the first sign of fear
- Distract them with play, reward positive behaviour
- Let them hide if they want to
- Let them rejoin you in their own time
- Never punish any anxious behaviour

Caged animals

- Place indoor cages in a quiet room and hutches in a garage or shed if possible
- If you can't bring your pet's hutch inside, turn it so it faces a wall or fence
- Use a blanket or duvet to cover aviaries or hutches, ensuring there's ample ventilation
- Give them extra bedding so they can burrow for safety

Wildlife

- Check bonfires for hedgehogs, frogs and toads before lighting them
- Creating alternative shelters nearby to distract from the bonfire
- Make the bonfire on the day of lighting so there's less chance of wildlife moving in
- Keep fireworks away from trees and hedges
- Light a bonfire on one side only, to allow any wildlife to escape

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