



Guide to Supporting Pets, People with PTSD, and Those with Neurodivergence During Fireworks

The information in this booklet has been put together by sourcing information from a variety of resources and may not be up to date, use the correct or most politically correct language, and is not intended to cause harm or offence.

Fireworks displays can be exciting for some, but for many—including pets, individuals with sensory sensitivities, and those with neurodivergence like ADHD and autism—they can be overwhelming and distressing. The loud noises, bright flashes, and unpredictability can trigger anxiety, discomfort, or sensory overload. This guide offers advice on how to prepare and support those affected, drawing on tips from the RSPCA, PTSD, ADHD, and autism charities.

For Sensitive Pets

Many pets, especially dogs and cats, are frightened by fireworks due to their acute hearing and instinct to react to sudden loud noises. The RSPCA offers the following strategies to help minimise stress for pets:

1. Create a Safe and Quiet Space

- Set up a calm, secure area indoors for your pet, filled with familiar bedding, toys, and items that make them feel at ease. Cats may prefer to hide, so let them retreat to their chosen spot.
- Place an item of clothing with your scent in their safe space, as familiar smells can be comforting.

2. Reduce Exposure to Loud Noises

- Close windows, doors, and curtains to block out the sounds and flashes from fireworks.
- Playing calming music or using a white noise machine can help to mask the noise. Pet-specific playlists or TV channels designed to soothe animals are also available.

3. Stay Calm and Reassure Them

- Pets can sense your emotions, so staying calm and acting normally helps them feel more secure. While you shouldn't overly fuss or satisfy them if they're nervous, offering gentle reassurance is beneficial.

4. Use Calming Aids

- Consult your vet about pheromone diffusers or anxiety wraps, which can help calm pets. In severe cases, your vet may recommend anxiety medications during fireworks season.

5. Distract and Engage

- Engage your pet with toys or puzzles to help shift their focus away from the sounds of fireworks. Dogs benefit from long walks earlier in the day, before the fireworks start.

For People with PTSD

People with PTSD or sensory overload may experience anxiety or distress during fireworks displays due to the loud, unexpected noises and bright flashes. PTSD charities like Combat Stress and PTSD UK offer several strategies to help reduce these reactions:

1. Create a Calm Environment

- Stay indoors in a quiet, safe space, away from direct exposure to fireworks. Earplugs or noise-cancelling headphones can help manage the loud sounds while drawing curtains or dimming lights can reduce the visual impact.

2. Use Grounding Techniques

- Slow, deep breathing is an effective way to manage feelings of panic or anxiety. Encourage those affected to use other grounding techniques, such as holding a comforting object, focusing on their surroundings, or sipping water to stay present and calm.

3. Plan

- If fireworks are a known trigger, having a plan in place helps. This could involve preparing a safe environment, ensuring access to noise-cancelling devices, and limiting exposure during fireworks events.
- Communication is vital—charities like Mind and PTSD UK recommend discussing these needs with family and friends so that everyone is on the same page about providing support.

4. Distraction Techniques

- Engaging in activities like reading, watching a film, or practising mindfulness can shift focus away from the external triggers.
- Some may find mindfulness exercises or guided meditation helpful, with apps like Headspace offering specific exercises to manage anxiety.

5. Seek Professional Support

- If fireworks cause significant distress, charities such as Mind and Combat Stress offer professional support and helplines that can provide tailored advice and coping strategies.

For People with Neurodivergence

Many people with neurodivergence, including those with ADHD or autism, experience sensory processing differences or sensitivities. The loud, sudden noises and flashes of fireworks can be particularly challenging for individuals with sensory processing differences. Positive, supportive approaches are vital in helping them feel safe and comfortable during fireworks displays. Charities like ADHD UK and the National Autistic Society recommend the following:

1. Prepare a Safe, Sensory-Friendly Space

- Create a quiet and comfortable environment where individuals can feel secure. Use soft lighting, familiar objects, and sensory aids like weighted blankets or fidget toys that provide calming feedback.
- Reducing external stimulation by closing windows, curtains, and doors helps limit the intensity of the sound and light from fireworks.

2. Use Headphones or Ear Defenders

- Many neurodivergent individuals find noise-cancelling headphones or ear defenders helpful in managing sensory overload caused by loud noises. Consider pairing these with calming music or white noise to reduce the impact further.

3. Prepare in Advance

- Let them know when fireworks are expected and explain what will happen. Predictability can reduce anxiety for some individuals. Visual schedules or social stories can help prepare autistic children for what to expect.

4. Allow for Control and Choice

- Offer individuals the choice to engage with or move away from the noise. Some neurodivergent individuals benefit from managing their sensory environment by adjusting sounds, lighting, or activities.
- The National Autistic Society suggests that allowing people the autonomy to manage their sensory experience helps them feel more in control, which can reduce anxiety.

5. Engage in Calming Activities

- Engage in soothing sensory activities, such as using fidget toys, engaging in tactile play, or watching calming videos. Hobbies or activities that provide focus, like puzzles or drawing, can also be excellent distractions.

6. Be Patient and Supportive

- It's essential to remain patient and understanding. Everyone's sensory experience is different, and neurodivergent individuals may need extra time and support to feel comfortable. Offering gentle reassurance and providing the tools they need to manage their environment can help reduce distress.

General Tips for Firework Season

- **Know Your Area:** Be aware of local firework displays and dates so you can prepare for yourself, your loved ones, or your pets.
- **Communicate with Neighbours:** If fireworks are set off in residential areas, consider speaking with neighbours to see if they can notify you when they plan to set them off. This can help you prepare a safe space for those who need it.
- **Calm Aftercare:** After the display, pets, children, and individuals may need extra care to recover from the stress. Create a calm, low-stimulation environment to help them settle down.

Firework season can be challenging for many, but with the proper preparation and support, it's possible to reduce distress for pets, people with PTSD or sensory sensitivities, and neurodivergent individuals. If you need further guidance, the RSPCA, PTSD UK, ADHD UK, and the National Autistic Society have many valuable resources to help support your loved ones and pets during this time.