

PIKE MOOR VETERINARY SURGEONS

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NOISE PHOBIAS such as a fear of fireworks

There are 3 categories of substance that can be used in dogs.

• PHEROMONES

Natural secretions produced by a brooding bitch have a calming effect on her puppies. This effect is still apparent in adulthood and can be used to calm a dog to reduce fear of fireworks. DAP diffuser packs are "plug-ins" which release a **Dog Appeasing Phormone** and should be used *at least 2 weeks* before bonfire night. Bearing in mind that fireworks are going off well before 5th November it is worth starting any therapy at the beginning of October. We have been using DAPs for several years now with great success.

• ANXIOLYTICS / SEROTONIN MODIFIERS

Behavioural disorders, including fear seem to trigger an imbalance of chemicals in the brain. Some drugs such will modify that brain chemistry and are very useful in restoring normal behaviour *without sedation*. They can be given for long periods of time with no risk of addiction. It will often take **several weeks** before the full therapeutic effect is seen and so the tablets should be started *at least 4 weeks* before the effect is required.

• SEDATIVES

These are best use as "one-off" doses eg just on bonfire night. The sedation varies from mild to profound depending on the dose which can be difficult to get exactly right because of individual susceptibility to the drugs. They must not be used in dogs with compromised breathing eg some of the short nosed breeds. Care should be taken when used in combination with certain other drugs - the vet will advise if drugs can be used together.

There is no scientific evidence that scullcap, valerian, chamomile, borax or any other homeopathic or herbal remedies are effective in noise phobias.

BEHAVIOURAL MODIFICATION

This is essential to potentiate the effect of the above therapies. As with any behavioural techniques you need to :-

- Reward the good acceptable behaviour
- **Ignore** and thus "punish" the unacceptable behaviour.

To do this effectively you need to provide the stimulus which provokes the fear in a controlled way. The best way to do this is to use a CD of firework and other noises - this can be obtained from ourselves or from www.soundsscary.com or www.companyofanimals.co.uk.

The CD should be played repeatedly starting at a low volume in a comfortable situation, rewarding good behaviour. Gradually the volume should be increased. If any negative reaction is shown then try to ignore the behaviour and go back to a lower volume until eventually the dog is tolerant of a higher noise level. Never "fuss" or reassure a dog when he is scared, this will only reinforce the dog's unwanted reaction. Increase the volume at times when the dog is naturally "happy" eg meal times or when a family member arrives home.

This may take several weeks or months of patient training every day before desensitisation is complete, and it needs reinforcing throughout the year - not just in November!

ON BONFIRE NIGHT

- Close the curtains but put bright lights on to reduce any visual flashes.
- Put some music on - preferably something with a repetitive drumbeat.
- Try to engage the dog in some active games.