

An Anxiety-Free New Year's for Dogs

Ways to keep your dog from being frightened by fireworks.

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New Year's Eve is fast approaching, and while many people delight in the sound and light of fireworks, some dogs and puppies react with fear and anxiety as they hear loud, unaccustomed noises.

So veterinarians at the Matthew J. Ryan Veterinary Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania have issued a reminder for owners to pay special attention to their dogs for signs of anxiety, and offer these suggestions:

First and foremost, dogs shouldn't be taken to community fireworks or other noisy events.

Second, if you can hear fireworks from your home, keep your dog or puppy indoors, preferably in a quiet "safe haven" area. Noise-phobic dogs sometimes try to hide in a closet or beneath a desk; encourage this behavior by offering food treats in the safe haven, and praise your dog for seeking shelter. Hiding can be a very effective strategy for dogs frightened by noises.

Third, play with your dog instead of petting him to fend off firework fears. Playing a game with your pet when he shows early signs of anxiety, like pacing or trembling, can distract him from the stressor and, in the long term, teach him to associate that same stressor with positive things such as play and treats.

Petting or soothing him is likely to make no difference and could reinforce that attention-seeking that comes with nervousness, the veterinarians say.