

## Norwegian Elkhounds October 5<sup>th</sup> 2024.

I have no news this week except a reminder that we are now into October with only 3 weeks until **Bonfire Night**. If you have a dog who is scared of fireworks, now is the time to start ordering in whatever you use to help calm them down. There are numerous things you can try.

Firstly, do not react yourself. The more normal the atmosphere the better the dogs will be. Close the curtains and put the TV on and act as you normally would. Make sure they have been out to potty and for a walk before it goes dark and don't let them out again until the noise has stopped. I'm fortunate that I have never had a dog with a fear of fireworks or thunder; maybe because we totally ignore them. Don't be tempted to make an excessive fuss of your dog if it is scared; it will only make it worse and reinforce the fear. Just sit by it and pet it gently and calmly. Your dog will pick up on any anxiety that you show.

You can get a DAP diffuser to plug in from your vet which gives off calming pheromones. The vets use these themselves in their kennels to calm anxious dogs and cats. Plug in a pheromone diffuser as close as possible to or even inside their favourite hiding place. This should be left operating 24 hours a day from 2 weeks before the firework event until 2 weeks after.

Bach Rescue remedy dropped on nose or tongue can help some or wearing a thundershirt can help a lot. I used a thundershirt when Poppy went through a fear phase when she was going deaf. When you first put it on, they tend to freeze and not try to move at all, but they very quickly get used to it. It worked well on Poppy who used to wear it on her walks. Alternatively, you can try an anxiety wrap made from a wide crepe bandage that you may already have. It needs to be wrapped snugly but not tight. Google will tell you how to wrap one.

Make sure the dog has a safe place to go to; some prefer to be under furniture like a bed and some choose to lie in a bathtub, especially for thunderstorms. Don't try to pull them out to be with you. They will choose their own safe place. Whatever you do, walk them before it gets dark and make sure their chip is up to date. If there's the remotest chance of a rogue firework while you are walking them, do NOT let them off lead. A frightened dog will bolt. Good luck and don't forget next morning to check your garden for spent fireworks which can be toxic to dogs.

Dorwest and others sell herbal tablets skullcap and valerian which can often help but you need to start giving them a few days before any fireworks start. Dorwest also have a whole section of advice on their blog of things you can try like using distraction games or creating a den for them under a table. You can also phone them for advice.

If you know your dog is extremely scared, consult your vet. Traditionally sedatives were used to help dogs through phobic events however these can actually make the problem

worse in the long term. Sedated dogs are aware and still afraid of the fireworks but are unable to get up and hide and so while appearing quiet often retain a greater fear of loud noises in the future. More recently anxiety relieving drugs such as diazepam have proved to be more effective in reducing noise related anxiety. They actually help the dog to forget the event but some dogs suffer from side effects so this should be a last resort and a very small dose tried in advance of bonfire night. Never use human tablets or dosage, always consult a vet.

If you want to try to desensitise your dog for next year, there used to be a CD called 'Sounds Scary' which had a range of noises and came with a booklet explaining how to introduce the noises to your dog. It is best to focus on the noise that most affects the dog first. However, desensitisation can take a very long time so it's probably too late to try for this year. It may be difficult to find now so try a website like Ebay for a used copy.

If you already have an older dog that is afraid, a young pup will often pick up on that fear and will react the same way so try to make bonfire night a happy time for your pup and if at all possible, keep the pup apart from the older dog but still with you.

Don't forget that Halloween can also upset them. Coming face to face with someone in a scary costume or mask can terrify some dogs and even if you dress up, your dog may not realise it's you so it's best to put on your costume where the dog can watch you. If you get children trick or treating at the door, keep your dogs safely away from the door, either behind a baby gate or shut in another room. If you are unfortunate enough to get a lot of callers, it can be very upsetting for the dogs to hear the doorbell repeatedly. You could also meet people in costumes on their walks and even the most placid of dogs could react in an unexpected manner. The law now requires that anyone should be able to come to your door without being frightened by a dog so it's best to keep them well away. We have a small porch with a door, so I always shut the dogs behind the porch door before opening the front door. It also stops them from slipping out. Thankfully the howl that Otta gives when the doorbell goes, is enough to discourage the most persistent of callers. That's why we call it "Howloween".

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