

Should you think twice before taking your baby to a firework display this year?

Guy Fawkes Night can be an exceptionally sensory experience for babies and young children. The lights, sights, colours, sounds and excitement make it an event worth celebrating. However, it is important to be extra careful about safety. Here are a few tips from Dr Lin Day, founder of Baby Sensory on how to make it a fun, safe occasion for your baby and the whole family.

Protect your baby's ears

Safety is paramount, so think about attending an organized display. Find a safe place and don't get too close to the fireworks. Loud noises above 80 dB can affect the development of hearing in babies and young children. Fireworks register at 140 dB, which is loud enough to cause permanent hearing loss. Earmuffs can effectively reduce dangerous levels of noise and can be used on babies as young as six weeks old. Unfortunately, there isn't any ear protection designed for newborn babies. It is never a good idea to use earplugs since these could damage the soft ear canal of a baby or young child. They could also become a potential choking hazard if they find their way to your baby's mouth.

Keep warm

Wrap your baby up in several layers of clothing, making sure that his or her hands, feet and head are well covered. A forward-facing sling carrier, or back pack, keeps your baby close to your body and provides warmth, safety and security. Putting your baby in a carrier also enables you to hold on to a mobile toddler or child, who may be inclined to walk off if unsupervised.

Be aware of toxic chemicals

Watching the bonfire can also be great fun, but it can pose a serious safety risk. Children are far more likely to get injured than adults, so safety and supervision are paramount. Sparks can fly out of the fire so fast that a baby's or child's eyelids may not have time to react. Even if emergency aid is immediate, damage to the eye could be permanent. Wood smoke contains over 200 chemicals, many of which are detrimental to health. Treated or painted wood smoke contains an even greater range of toxic compounds. The only way to prevent injury, and to protect children's health, is to keep them at a safe distance from the source of danger.

Dealing with fear and panic

Most children are mesmerised by fireworks, but if your baby or child becomes overwhelmed or frightened, offer plenty of reassurance. If this doesn't work, make a quick get-away. An alternative would be to watch the display from the car. If all goes well, the family can stand outside the car for a better view.

If you're celebrating at home

If you are thinking of celebrating Guy Fawkes Night at home, set the theme with Handel's 'Music for the Royal Fireworks' or Tchaikovsky's 1812 cannon overture. Use LED battery operated fairy lights to create a magical effect (the bulbs do not get hot, so there is no risk of injury). Serve hot soup or drinks to adults in glass-free flasks to reduce the risk of accidents, but keep alcohol out of the reach of small hands. Even a small amount left in a glass can be poisonous to a baby or small child.

Sparkler facts

Never give a sparkler to a child under five years of age. A sparkler reaches a temperature of about 2000°C, which is five times hotter than cooking oil. Older children should wear protective gloves, hold a sparkler at arm's length and be fully supervised at all times. Sparklers can stay hot after they have gone out, so plunge them into a bucket of water to keep children safe. If fireworks are to be used, avoid firecrackers, jumping jacks and spinners that can cause damage and injury. The best option for babies and children is to look at the display from an upstairs window.

Enjoy!

If your baby or child is warm, wears earmuffs and keeps a safe distance from the bonfire and fireworks, then the celebrations will be stimulating, safe, fun and memorable for everyone.

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