






SEPARATION ANXIETY

Separation anxiety is a common, and challenging, issue that many dog adopters encounter, especially when a dog first goes home. It refers to the distress or anxiety that dogs experience when they are separated from their adopters or left alone. This can manifest in various ways, ranging from mild to severe, and it can affect dogs of all breeds and ages. If your dog is struggling with separation anxiety, please also read our guide, "Crate Training and Being Alone", for more extensive instructions to get your dog slowly used to being left alone. Please remember this is a slow process and will take time to work through.










SYMPTOMS OF SEPARATION ANXIETY

Please note these symptoms indicate extreme stress and are NOT your dog trying to get "revenge" or punish you because they are left alone. Dogs don't think in the same way humans do, and these behaviors are always purely due to stress.

-  **EXCESSIVE VOCALIZATION:** Dogs with separation anxiety may bark, whine, or howl excessively when left alone.
-  **DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIOR:** They may chew furniture, shoes, or other items, scratch doors or walls, and engage in other destructive behaviors as a way to cope with their anxiety.
-  **HOUSE SOILING:** Some dogs may urinate or defecate indoors even if they are house-trained.
-  **PACING OR RESTLESSNESS:** An anxious dog may exhibit restlessness, pacing, or excessive drooling.
-  **ESCAPE ATTEMPTS:** Some dogs may try to escape from confinement, such as by digging or scratching at doors and windows.

TREATMENT AND MANAGEMENT

If your dog is struggling with separation anxiety, please also read our guide, "Crate Training and Being Alone", for more extensive instructions to get your dog slowly used to being left alone. Please remember this is a slow process and will take time to work through. It's important to be patient and consistent in your efforts to desensitize your dog to your routine. Not all dogs will respond in the same way, and some may require more time and effort than others. The goal is to make your departures and absences routine, predictable, and less anxiety-inducing for your dog, helping to prevent separation anxiety from developing in the first place or to mitigate its effects. Below are general guidelines that will help in conjunction with working slowly to get your dog used to being alone.

-  **CREATE A SAFE SPACE:** Establish a comfortable and secure space for your dog when you're not at home. This could be a crate, a designated room, or an exercise pen. Make sure it's a place where your dog feels safe and has access to water, toys, and bedding.
-  **USE BACKGROUND NOISE:** Leaving some soft background noise, like calming music or a white noise machine, can help mask sounds that might trigger anxiety, such as outside noises. If you regularly have the tv or a certain type of music on when you are home, leave it on while you are away so the home feels more “normal” to them.
-  **LEAVE INTERACTIVE TOYS:** Provide your dog with interactive toys, puzzle feeders, or treat-dispensing toys that can keep them engaged and mentally stimulated while you're away. This can help create a positive association with your departures.
-  **DON'T MAKE DEPARTURE A BIG DEAL:** Avoid making a big fuss when you're about to leave or when you return. This helps your dog understand that departures and arrivals are not significant events.
-  **START WITH SHORT ABSENCES:** Begin by leaving your dog alone for very short periods, even if it's just for a minute or two. This helps your dog understand that you leaving is temporary.
-  **PRACTICE DEPARTURES:** Practice leaving the house regularly throughout the day without actually going anywhere. Grab your keys or put on your coat but don't leave. This helps desensitize your dog to these cues. In addition, on days you are not working, still leave for 5-10 minutes at least once per day to keep your dog used to you coming and going.
-  **VARY YOUR ROUTINE:** Dogs often pick up on the patterns of their owner's routine. Try to change the sequence of your actions before leaving to break the predictability. For example, put on your shoes before you have breakfast or do something unusual before leaving. If your dog gets stressed whenever you pick up your keys, walk around the house regularly with your keys to get them to stop associating them with the stress of you leaving.
-  **PRACTICE ALONE TIME:** Gradually increase the duration of your departures. Start with a few minutes and work your way up to longer periods. Be sure to return before your dog becomes anxious (see our Crate Training and Being Alone Guide)
-  **SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP:** If your dog still struggles with separation anxiety, consider consulting a professional dog trainer or a veterinary behaviorist. They can assess your dog's specific needs and create a tailored desensitization plan. Veterinarians may also prescribe medications to help alleviate extreme anxiety and stress when these steps alone do not help.

KEEP IT UP

Once your dog is comfortable being alone, continue to keep your dog in a routine of leaving them crated or alone for periods of time regularly. If you get them used to being alone and then never leave them alone for a long period of time (days, weeks, months) they could regress and you'd need to start the process over again based on their comfort levels and durations they can tolerate.