



TIPS TO TREAT YOUR DOGS SEPARATION ANXIETY

BY PETS OWN US

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Introduction

Even the most loyal and dedicated dog owner must venture out of the house, either occasionally or daily, without the company of their four-legged friend. Leaving Fido at home with food, water, and shelter is certainly not cruel or unusual treatment, and yet every day otherwise well behaved and loving dogs engage in prison style riots every time their masters leave them alone in the house. There are stories of how dog owners had to part with loved dogs because of separation anxiety. The causes of separation anxiety in dogs can vary as much as the types of destruction an anxious dog can cause.

Anyone who has dealt with a dog that can't be left alone knows the cycle of guilt, stress, expense, and anger that can develop. While the problem is serious, fortunately, there are some solutions. As with many pet issues, understanding the how and the why of separation anxiety in dogs is essential to ending the negative behavior. Learn exactly what separation anxiety is, what causes it, and how to deal with it. Your pet, your home, and your nerves will thank you!



Understanding Separation

Anxiety Separation in dogs is the fear or dislike of isolation. Separation anxiety often results in destructive dog behavior that is not desirable or acceptable. Separation anxiety is one of the most common and misunderstood causes of canine behavioral problems, often resulting in the frustrated dog owner finding a new home for the dog. As social animals, it is normal for puppies to form attachments to their mother and littermates. Once a puppy is separated from its mother, he begins to form an attachment to his owner. Attachment implies the formation of a trusting bond.

All dog owners should hope to form a strong bond with their dog. A strong attachment between dog and master is perfectly healthy. The problem arises when a dog becomes overly dependent on his owner and is unable to abide any kind of separation without becoming extremely anxious and acting out in destructive ways. A more applicable definition of separation anxiety in dogs can be defined by a few specific behaviors that take place only in the owner's absence.

Negative Behaviors

- Digging, chewing, and scratching at doors or windows in an attempt to escape and reunite with their owners.
- Howling, barking, and crying in an attempt to get their owner's attention and let them know that they need them to return.
- Urination and defecation in various places in the house; even with housetrained dogs.

A dog that exhibits these types of behaviors while his master is home, as well as when they leave, is not suffering from separation anxiety. A dog with separation anxiety becomes anxious specifically due to separation from his owner. The negative and destructive behavior that ensues is a genuine panic response from the anxious dog. A dog with separation anxiety is not acting out of boredom or lack of training or exercise.

Making the distinction between a misbehaving dog and a dog stricken with separation anxiety is very important. A dog that is acting out negatively, for any number of reasons,

can be punished and trained to achieve positive results. A dog acting out due to fear and anxiety is a different story, and requires a different approach.

The owner of a dog with separation anxiety must realize that they can't punish away the anxiety that results from separation. The approach and methods needed to deal with these separate behavioral issues are exclusive to the issue, making it extremely important to ascertain whether a dog is suffering separation anxiety or simply behaving badly when given the opportunity.

Not sure if your pooch is behaving badly or genuinely suffering? Key Behaviors of Dogs with Separation Anxiety.



- The dog chews on a variety of household items, often focusing on items that smell most like his owner, such as recently worn clothes. This includes underwear or socks, which may have a stronger owner scent than other articles of clothing. The dog only chews these items when his owner is gone. If the dog chews on his owner's possessions even when the owner is around, there is a different problem.

- The dog tries to stay close to or lie on items that smell most of his owner. This probably explains why an otherwise well-behaved dog disregards his boundaries and gets on the owner's sofa or favorite chair when the owner is away.
- The dog, although completely house broken, urinates and/ or defecates in numerous places in the home.
- The dog barks continuously during his owner's absence; the barking is not on-off on-off, but consistent for the duration of his owner's absence. You won't be there to hear it, but your neighbors will probably let you know about it. Or, if you suspect that this is happening and don't have neighbors close enough to hear the dog barking, you may want to leave a recording device going while you're away from home or invest in a WIFI Pet Camera.
- The dog always shows these behaviors when left alone, even for short periods of thirty minutes and under.
- The dog is overly excited to greet his owner and remains stressed, anxious, and clingy for some time after his owner returns.
- The otherwise well trained and obedient dog shows no shame or remorse for destroyed and chewed items.
- Destruction begins soon after the owner leaves. You can test this one by leaving for a few minutes and then coming back home and seeing if the dog has already started chewing, urinating or defecating, has already been on the furniture, or engaged in other destructive behavior.
- The dog cannot be isolated from his owner at any time without exhibiting negative behavior; even in a different nearby room with the door closed.
- The dog gets increasingly distressed as his owner indicates that he is preparing to leave the home. The dog may start following you and whimpering when you put your shoes or coat on, or grab your purse, or take the car keys off the key peg.
- The dog is constantly following his owner from room to room, demanding attention. Every time you get out of your seat, the dog will get up and follow you to wherever you go. If you go into the bathroom and close the door, he may sit at the door and whine until you come back out.
- The dog dislikes spending time outside alone, and may act like you are punishing him when you put him outside unless you go outside with him.

Whatever the individual behaviors exhibited, if a dog is experiencing any form of separation anxiety it is very important to investigate the cause as well as a possible solution to the unwanted actions. When a dog with separation anxiety is not redirected to feel secure while alone, his chances of remaining in a happy and healthy environment are slim.

What Causes Dog Separation Anxiety?

No one fully understands all the factors that allow one dog from a litter to function in a healthy and safe fashion when left alone, while a littermate with the same genetics feels extreme anxiety when left alone.

Animal behaviorists believe that in many cases dogs with separation anxiety are exhibiting behaviors that are a mixture of nature and nurture. Nurture—meaning the dog has learned behavior reinforced by the dog's owner. Nature—meaning the dog may have a possible predisposition towards dependency on the owner.

While most dog owners will never fully know the exact combination of nature and nurture that makes their dog dread any kind of separation, some understanding of what causes the anxiety can be very helpful in putting an end to it. The best solution to the negative behavior depends, in part, on the reason for the behavior.

Common Environmental Factors for Dogs with Separation Anxiety

- A dog that has become accustomed to constant human companionship and then is left alone for the first time and often thereafter.
- A dog is left alone following a long interval, such as a vacation, during which time the owner and dog are constantly together.
- The dog has endured a traumatic or violent experience such as a period of time spent at an animal shelter, a time with violent abusive owners, or a frightening event such as a fire in the home.
- A change is made in the owner's lifestyle or routine: a change in work schedule, a move to a new home, or a new pet or person in the home.
- The dog believes he is the pack leader, and panics when his owner is out from under his watchful eye. The dog actually feels responsible for watching his owner at all times.
- A dog is removed from his mother or littermates at too young of an age and is emotionally under-developed.

Another common factor among dogs with separation anxiety is learned helplessness or dependency reinforced by the dog's owner. As mentioned above, some dogs go

long periods of time being in constant contact with their owner. These owners may work from home, be retired, or have families with members that remain in the home during the day, so that there is always someone at home with the dog. This set up may passively reinforce certain dogs' fear of separation.



Some dog owners unintentionally go even further in teaching their dog to be afraid and anxious by never socializing their dog with other dogs or people. Ironically, this lack of socialization outside the home can render some dogs incapable of being left alone in the home for any period of time.

As well-intentioned as over protective owners are, overly indulgent pet owners may sometimes humanize dogs in an unhealthy way. Examples of this behavior include attaching human-like emotion to leaving or reuniting with the dog. Prolonged sorrowful goodbyes when leaving, and overly exuberant greetings upon returning, do more to ease the owners mind than calm or console the dog. These interactions are purely kind and empathetic on the owner's part, but may reinforce negative behavior in some dogs that are prone to separation anxiety.

Preventing Dogs from Developing Separation Anxiety

Preventing most dogs from developing separation anxiety is fairly simple. Barring cases of strong genetic disposition, small preventative measures tend to be quickly effective. Many of the ideas used to prevent separation anxiety from becoming a problem are

simply less difficult and in-depth versions of measures used to try to correct separation anxiety. As with most problems, separation anxiety is usually easier to prevent than cure.

Think of habits and behaviors that will discourage the development of separation anxiety as essentially the opposite of the behaviors listed in possible causes of separation anxiety.

When introducing a new dog into the home simply follow these guidelines to avoid future problems with separation anxiety:

- Minimize arrivals and departures. Pay extra attention to the dog an hour before you leave or after you return, but not immediately before or after. In other words, don't make a big deal out of leaving or returning. Your dog will take the cue from you that separation is not a big deal.
- Set boundaries in the home. A dog that has firm boundaries from day one feels secure in knowing he is not in charge and can therefore rest easy and let the pack leader (you) take care of business. It is a huge burden for a dog who feels he is in charge. He can't control you or protect you when you are gone, and this makes him very nervous.
- Give your dog alone time. From the time you bring a new dog home, separate yourself from the dog for varying amounts of time. Use a back yard or a baby gate in the home to teach the dog that separation is to be expected and not feared. Don't use separation time as punishment, or turn it into a negative time for the dog. Treat separation time as matter-of-factly as possible.

Individuals bringing young puppies into the home may find some of these concepts especially helpful. These measures combined with crate training will go a long way in teaching a puppy that his "den" (crate) is a safe place day or night, alone, or in his owner's company.

These acclimation exercises will also aid in most puppies' understanding of respecting the den in terms of the house-breaking process and destructive chewing.

How to Reduce, Treat, Cure Separation Anxiety



Anyone who feels guilty about behavior that could have contributed to the dog's anxiety, should simply realize their error in judgment, and modify their behavior. Feeling sorry for the dog or the situation will do nothing to rectify the problem and will usually create further issues as the owner coddles the dog because he feels guilty. With patience and a firm understanding of why the dog is behaving in a destructive and agitated manner, simply change any negative habits that may be reinforcing the dog's anxiety. Once the owner has changed his own habits, it's time to investigate possible solutions to the dog's separation anxiety.

There are many possible solutions to even extremely serious cases of separation anxiety. Most dogs can absolutely be redirected or rehabilitated to the point of feeling safe, confident, and secure in the absence of their owner. The first step in working to conquer separation anxiety is to completely abandon the concept of punishing away separation anxiety. Punishment is not an effective means of dealing with this issue. The circumstances which make the dog feel anxious must be modified before the negative behavior will cease; the negative behavior will not cease with punishment. The dog owner must work to make the dog feel safe and secure. This can mean distracting the dog from the fact that he's alone, reminding him of his place in the household pack, or in some extreme cases, introducing anti-anxiety medication. Whatever course of action is taken, it's important to remember that punishment is an unfair and futile way to deal with separation anxiety.

Here are realistic and compassionate ways to deal with separation anxiety. One or more of these ideas will help most dogs and their owners to move past separation anxiety.

Provide Plenty of Exercise and Mental Stimulation

While boredom and true separation anxiety are two very different issues, a dog that is not properly exercised is much more likely to act upon feelings of fear or anxiety while his owner is away. A happy, tired dog is much more likely to sleep through his owner's absence. If at all possible, exercise the dog close enough to departure that he is still tired and content when it's time for you to leave. The level of exercise needed to tire the dog's body and de-stress his brain will depend on the dog's age and breed.

Owners of young dogs that are past the age of easily tiring from a little romping may need to dedicate up to two hours a day or more to exercising their pooch. If a two-hour block of time is hard to come by, consider breaking the exercise into two separate sessions. These sessions will ideally take place at the beginning and the end of your daily school or work routine, so the dog will gain confidence in the fact that you will return for the exercise session.

When exercising the dog, consider his individual activity needs. Certain breeds may require a fast-paced walk or jog. Other breeds may be content to meander through a park or investigate other dogs in a dog park. Just like people, dogs are not one-size-fits all when it comes to activity levels and exercise needs. Certain breeds will do best when allowed to engage in activities for which they are bred.

It's simple; if possible, let retrievers retrieve, let herders herd, and let swimmers swim. Some light Internet research will provide information on what activity is right for your breed. Purebreds with a strong drive to do what they were bred to do are sometimes unhappy until they feel they have done "their job." This is a deep internal drive that is bred into these dogs over hundreds or even thousands of years. Consider these breed factors when exercising dogs.

Physical exercise should not be an occasional treat or luxury for any dog. Making time to exercise the dog is an absolute requirement of being a good dog owner. If time or physical limitations keep you from exercising the dog, consider using a treadmill for the dog (following all safety rules), or hiring a dog walker. However, it's accomplished, exercise is essential.

Aside from physical activity, many breeds and individual personalities may require more mental stimulation than your current daily routine is providing. Very curious or highly intelligent dogs can work through a lot of energy and anxiety by completing activities that challenge and reward their intelligence. Agility training is a great way to give these dogs both physical and mental exercise. Any household training exercises will also go a long way in entertaining and redirecting a nervous dog's energy and attention.



Change the Routine

In addition to minimizing fuss or attention surrounding the comings and goings in the home, it can sometimes be helpful to literally change the exit or entrance used for routine arrivals and departures. Some anxious dogs create very regimented rituals surrounding the owner's departure. Something as simple as leaving through the garage instead of the front door can sometimes interrupt the dog's normal feeling of anxiety and redirect their attention.

In addition to changing the door that is used, consider your routine. Are there certain things that are always done in a certain order before leaving the home? Do you put your shoes on, then go to the closet for your jacket, then grab your keys, always in that order? If so, attempt to change up the order and times. As strange as it sounds, simple modifications in the household routine can sometimes end or lessen the dog's negative association with his owner's departure.

Feed Before You Leave

Just like people, dogs react very negatively to feeling hungry. A nervous dog that is also hungry is likely to become agitated and frustrated. Frustration leads to pacing, pacing leads to chewing, and so on. A well exercised, mentally engaged dog with a belly full of food is much more likely to handle feelings of anxiety in a calm and sleepy manner. Foods full of complex carbohydrates are especially effective in encouraging dogs to nap.

A food containing lots of oats is a great option, as many dogs can be sensitive to large amounts of wheat or soy in their food. When dealing with young dogs or departures that will last for several hours make sure to give the dog an opportunity to take care of elimination business outside before being confined to the house.

Leave the Radio or TV On

It may sound silly to some, but leaving on a little background noise can help your dog deal with anxiety. For dogs that hate to be left alone, silence is associated with anxiety and fear. Talk radio or soothing music can help alleviate tension and redirect negative associations between silence and being alone. A low volume TV or radio can also help to distract the dog from what may be going on outside. This can go a long way in calming an anxious dog that otherwise jumps and barks at every outside noise he hears.

Provide Entertainment

Anxious dogs are prone to barking, chewing, and scratching when the owner is away. Keeping an anxious dog entertained can help distract them from these destructive habits, and save your furniture, shoes, and other personal belongings. Dogs are easily entertained. Dog entertainment can be a special chew toy, a big bone, or even another dog for a playmate.

Please note that anyone who is considering the additional pet route for entertaining an anxious dog, should really think long and hard about their motivation for adding a second dog to the brood. It's generally not a good idea to expect a second dog to "fix" the problem dog. If you already want a second dog anyway, and you have the time, money, and patience needed to become a multiple-dog household, it may be a great help for lonely anxious dogs.

A more sane and rational alternative for most households is to simply leave treats and toys aplenty to entertain and busy the dog while everyone is gone. Many dog owners swear by durable rubber toys that can be filled with treats or peanut butter. These toys provide a challenge for the dog. He must "work" to get the treat, and this will keep him busy for some time.

In order for the dog to be enamored with the toy or treat for any length of time, it should be a special one; and it may be best to keep certain treats or toys limited to only when you leave the house. This helps the dog know that when you leave the house, he will have a special treat or toy while you are gone. The toy or treat will also be more entertaining for the dog if you rotate them on a regular basis, not giving the same one each time you leave.

If the toy or treat becomes too old-hat for the dog, he won't be entertained with it for long. Always keep them wanting more of the toy or the treats inside the toy. These toys can easily entertain a dog for an hour or more. Even a half hour of distraction can be beneficial in helping a dog forget that he's been left home alone.



Crating your Dog

Confining a dog to a crate to keep him safe and out of trouble is sometimes a great win win scenario for your home and the dog. Many dog owners may initially view crating as inhumane and uncaring, but if properly introduced the crate can help to make the anxious dog feel safe and secure. Dogs have a natural “den” instinct. Many dogs will seek to recreate this cozy den-like feeling somewhere in the home. A clean and comfortable crate of the appropriate size will typically meet the need for a den-like dwelling and become a favorite place for the dog.

Of course, as with most training methods, there are certain considerations to be addressed. Dogs that have an innate fear of confined spaces should never be crated. In rare cases dogs can and do suffer from literal claustrophobia. It would obviously be cruel, not to mention counterproductive, to confine these animals to any sort of small, closed space. Even if the dog has no previous issues with confined spaces you may need to gradually introduce the crate.

Try initially leaving the door off of the crate completely. Leave treats or toys in the crate to lure the dog in. Let him freely come and go from the crate. This will help to form a

positive association with the crate. Gradually, over time, replace the door and start to close it, confining the dog for short periods of time.

Consider putting the dog in the crate at night while you're at home, as a test run, before confining him when you leave. If the inside temperature isn't too warm, it can be helpful to cover the crate at night to help shield light and muffle outside sounds. The crate can be placed anywhere in the home. You may want the dog in your bedroom, or in a more isolated place such as the laundry room. If the crate starts out in your bedroom you can also phase it out, gradually moving it further and further from where you sleep. This will help to foster independence in the dog.

When the time comes to use the crate when leaving the house, make sure the dog has been fed and taken outside prior to being confined. In warm or dry climates, attach a water bottle to the crate so the dog doesn't become thirsty and become anxious over how he will get water. Dog water bottles generally have chew resistant, dropper-style spouts and can be found at any feed or pet store.

Before crating the dog, be sure to remove any non-breakaway collars or any items such as a leash, which could be caught on any parts of the crate. Line the crate with some comfortable padding. Preferably, the padding should be something that can easily be removed and washed. Provide a small toy or treats to amuse the dog and you're ready to go.

There are two important rules regarding crate training: never use the crate as a form of punishment and never let the dog out of the crate for whining, barking, or howling. If you do, you are teaching him that if he throws a tantrum you will respond by doing what he wants you to do. Wait until he is quiet and calm and then let him out.

It may even be a good idea to develop a queue or code word to praise the dog for being calm, such as "good quiet" or "good hush." This way you can give the command "hush" or "quiet" and the dog will associate it with a reward of treats or praise, as well as being allowed out of the crate. When you crate the dog, always be mindful of how long you will be gone.

The crate is a great option, but it only works well within the confines of responsible and humane boundaries. [Browse our 'Den' collection for dogs and puppies](#), that mimics the natural shape that dogs would recognize when needing a safe area. Your dog will identify his or her Den as a calm and tranquil area which they can relax and sleep in on their own terms

Aromatherapy and Dog Appeasement Pheromones

Dogs obviously have an extremely sensitive sense of smell. Many people believe that, because of this heightened connection between scent and environment, aromatherapy is more effective for dogs than people. It's a relatively simple undertaking. Try using a diffuser or plug in air freshener to spread calming scents such as lavender throughout the house. If nothing else, this may work to calm the dog owner.

A more targeted approach to using scent to calm your dog is to use DAP or dog appeasement pheromones. These pheromones imitate the scent of a nursing mother dog. Since this scent is universally pleasant and calming, some dogs take a cue from the scent and peacefully sleep or relax. The pheromone comes in many forms including a plug infuser, a spray, and even a collar.

Reviews of these products seem to report either extreme success or absolutely zero impact, so be aware that the results vary quite a bit, depending on the pup.

Medication

Even a few short years ago, medicating Fido to help him deal with his separation anxiety issues would have been a joke. Now, in the age of pharmaceuticals for every issue and ailment, dogs have been welcomed into the medication fold. Most pet owners are understandably reluctant to medicate their dogs. Many dog owners consider medication to be an extreme step that should be turned to only as a last resort. However, in cases where no amount of redirection or training is effective, medication may be a last chance at keeping some dogs in safe and happy homes with their owner.

If a prescription seems too drastic, look into giving the dog some form of melatonin to calm his anxiety. Melatonin is a hormone that is produced by the pineal gland in the brain of mammals. Melatonin is thought to help regulate the natural rhythms of sleep and wakefulness. Melatonin is available in many forms including pills and even treats. Look for melatonin at grocery or drug stores. Melatonin products made especially for dogs can be found at pet stores.

Some holistic vets recommend using a valerian formula for dogs. Valerian is an herb that is used for treating nervousness and anxiety. You can also purchase “calming collars” for dogs, which are collars filled with calming herbs, or put calming herbs in your dog’s water.

When it comes to prescription anti-anxiety medications for dogs, there are two main players commonly used by vets: Clomicalm and Reconcile. Clomicalm is a serotonin reuptake inhibitor and is used in humans for treating obsessive compulsive disorder. It is similar to medications for humans such as Prozac. You may have heard of this medication being referred to as doggy Prozac.

The active ingredient in Clomicalm is clomipramine hydrochloride and it comes in tablet form, by prescription only. If medication is used, it would be best to use in conjunction with behavior modification.

Reconcile is the newest drug treatment on the market and is manufactured by Eli Lilly Co. This is the first FDA drug approved specifically to treat separation anxiety in dogs. The active ingredient, fluoxetine hydrochloride, is also the active ingredient in the human medication Prozac. It is a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor and is marketed as more specific for separation anxiety than Clomicalm.

Obviously either of these medications or any others will need to be prescribed by a licensed veterinarian. Again, these medications work best when used in conjunction with training and behavior modification, so it’s probably best to try training and behavior modification first, and only resort to medication if necessary, as all drugs come with some side effects.

Doggy Day Care



Weather used temporarily as a means of sparing your home from certain ruin, or as a last ditch effort for a dog that does not seem to respond to any kind of behavior modification, doggy day care can be a positive option.

Doggy day care is also a great option for people who realize that they are simply away from home for too many hours per week to realistically be fair to and healthy for their dog. Dog day care is not a cure for separation anxiety, but it may be a transitional step to help socialize your dog and get him used to being away from you, to the point that he is eventually able to stay at home alone without experiencing anxiety.

No matter where you live you should be able to find local dog day care. Most care providers have some guidelines which must be adhered to before they will take your dog into their care. Your dog will typically need to play well with others, be healthy, and have current vaccine records for at least rabies and distemper.

It's a good idea to check references for doggy day cares just as you would for a vet or dog walker. Take a good look around the facility? Is it clean safe, and accommodating?

Does the business adhere to all state and local licensing and health rules? Does it look like a place where your dog would enjoy spending time? Is the place overcrowded—

meaning your dog would not get much individual attention? What is the owner or director's philosophy on disciplining dogs, giving attention to dogs, exercising dogs, etc.? Switching your dog from anxiety over being home alone to anxiety about day care won't accomplish anything.

In addition to checking references, talk to other people who are dropping their dogs off at the center you are interested in. Ask them questions about the owners and or employees of the day care. If your schedule and pocket book allow for the time and expense of delivering your dog to a doggy day care, it may be an excellent way to end your battle with an anxious dog consistently being left alone at home while you spend long hours at work, or for other reasons. But, even if you do choose the doggy day care route, continue to work with your dog on separation anxiety issues.

We recommend award winning – [Bruces Doggy Day Care](#) with centers in London & Surrey. They also offer a convenient pick up service. Alternatively, research on [Dog Buddy](#) for all UK locations.

Be Patient and Understanding

Whatever route is taken to gain control of separation anxiety, remember to be patient and understanding. Set realistic goals and boundaries and stick with them. Most dogs really want and need for you to take charge in order for them to feel completely at ease in all situations. Remove the stress from the situation by calmly dealing with issues in a humane and proactive way. Continue to research and study new ways to deal with separation anxiety.

Talk to other dog owners at dog parks and pet stores, or start a discussion thread on a dog training/health forum online. There is no sure-fire cure that will work for every dog of every shape, size and personality, so word of mouth methods that worked from other caring dog owners may reveal a little-known tactic that might just work for your dog.

Now that you know what you're dealing with and what some of the options are, good luck to you. Here's hoping that you and your dog achieve peace and harmony whether together or apart.