

Canine Separation Anxiety

What is separation anxiety and what is not?

Separation anxiety is the occurrence of distress when your dog is separated from the person to whom it is most attached. Affected pets may vocalize, destroy objects, eliminate indoors, pace, whine, salivate, etc. Videotaping your pet when you are not home may help facilitate the diagnosis. Distress typically sets in shortly after departure. Medical reasons for your pet's behavior should always be ruled out by your veterinarian. It is important to note that not all destructive behavior or house soiling is related to separation anxiety. Furthermore, some animals exhibit frustration with barriers, such as crates, and do not have true separation anxiety.

What can you do?

First, interact with your dog only at your initiative and only when your dog is relaxed. Praise your dog only after he/she relaxes. Teach your dog to stay calm and be alone. Have he/she lie down as you slowly back away and reward good behavior. Occasionally leave the room for a few minutes and shut the door behind you. The goal is to teach your pet to be happy even if you are not in the vicinity.

Second, give departure cues at times other than departure. For example, put on your shoes, grab your keys, and don't leave the house. If you crate your dog, do not do it solely when you leave the house or your pet will resent being crated.

When you do leave, show complete indifference to your pet before leaving. Although this may be difficult, imagine one day relieving the severe anxiety he/she experiences when you leave! Occasionally leave a food filled toy to occupy and relax your pet before you leave. (Such toys should also be given at times when you are home so your pet does not associate them with your departure.)

When you return, ignore your dog until he/she is quiet and relaxed. Interact only on your initiative and only when your pet is calm. Again, this may be difficult for you at first. Always remember you are doing this for your pet's long term well being.

Do not reprimand your pet for destructive behavior while you are gone. Your pet is frightened and fearful when you leave and punishing him/her makes it worse.

Try a DAP (dog appeasing pheromone) diffuser, spray, or collar. It is a safe, easy, inexpensive thing to try and is effective in many pets at decreasing their anxiety level.

Try supplements aimed to improve anxiety, such as Solliquin. Please do NOT try any new products without discussing with your veterinarian first.

Try "Alexa, open calm my dog (or cat)". Or try "Alexa, open relax my dog". Note these are 'skill's that have to be enabled but are free with your Alexa device.

Did you know?

Anti-anxiety medications are used to facilitate a behavior modification plan and are not very effective when used alone. In a study of approximately 600 dogs, 73% showed significant improvement within 8 weeks of being on a prescription anti-anxiety drug with behavior modification training. Most pets do not require life long medication. While this is not true for all pets, many require only a few months of medication as long as the owner works with their pet appropriately. Talk to your veterinarian about what is best for your pet.

For more information see: http://drsophiayin.com/resources/dog_behavior and www.veterinarypartner.com