Separation Anxiety

What is Separation Anxiety?

Separation anxiety is a panic issue, a fear of being home alone. Dogs in the clutches of this condition are experiencing a genuine phobia about alone time as it is terrifying for them. Have you ever known or met someone afraid of flying, spiders, or perhaps public speaking? If so, then you recognize how real that fear feels to them and how debilitating it can be. Dogs struggling with separation anxiety are having a hard time, not giving you a hard time.

What are some indicators of Separation Anxiety?

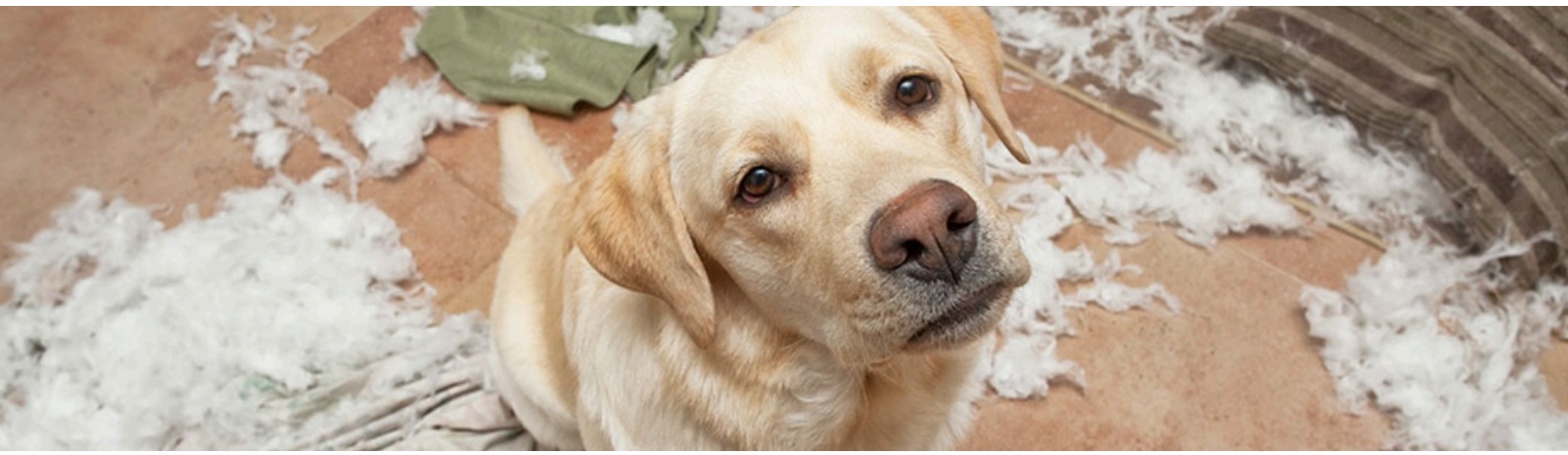
- Periods of crying, barking howling when alone
- Uncontrolled urination or defecating
- Destructive behaviours e.g. chewing furniture, windows, doors
- Self-inflicting injuries when attempting to escape
- Pacing, panting, drooling

What causes Separation Anxiety?

We know a lot about what does not cause it; yet, we know very little about what does. There are studies to suggest that genetics likely play a role in separation anxiety, so don't believe the myth that only dogs from shelters and rescues are afflicted. Recent research has also dispelled a few other causation myths. Separation anxiety is not caused by showing your dog affection, letting them sleep in your bed, celebrating their birthday, taking them with you everywhere, or a lack of structure.

What should I do next?

- Seek out help!
- Separation anxiety is no small feat, a support team is so beneficial
- Positive Reinforcement Trainer, Veterinarian, Vet Behaviourist, Family



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Separation Anxiety

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FOR ALL DOGS



DO's

DO - Suspend all unsupervised absence outside of the specified training
DO - Take things gradually so the dog can learn alone time is safe
DO - Ensure the dog gets adequate exercise and enrichment each day
DO - Help the dog to become comfortable alone without distractions
DO - Spend time determining where the dog is most comfortable in the home
DO - Stay calm on departures and arrivals home, ignoring the dog until they are calm and guiding them to their safe space
DO - Try adding classical music or natural sounds on when dog is alone
DO - Reach out for help! Positive Reinforcement Trainer!



DON'Ts

DON'T - Wait it out until the dog is vocalising - remember they are experiencing panic!
DON'T - Resort to any punishment techniques that will likely exacerbate the problem
DON'T - Expect that excessively exercising your dog will resolve separation anxiety
DON'T - Assume that a dog has to be confined in order lessen the destruction or to be safe - Remember the dog needs the feel safe

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Enrichment 101

What is Enrichment?

Enrichment is the process of providing a stimulating environment for animals, allows them to perform species-typical behaviours. While also enhances your dog's wellbeing and fulfilling their individual needs.



Purpose -

- Provides a suitable outlet for your dogs natural behaviours
- Reduces boredom, destructive behaviours
- Builds positive associations with different environments
- Teaches self soothing
- slows eating down, reduces changes of bloat and improves digestion

FORAGING



Empty egg carton -

- scatter kibble in carton, addition of peanut butter
- Allows the dog to forage, bite and dissect which are natural behaviours
- You can make it harder by tying some string around the carton

Snuffle Mat/Scatter Feed



- Scatter food on snuffle mat or on ground outside
- Can scatter on grass, makeshift snuffle mat
- Encourages your dog to use their nose

LICKING

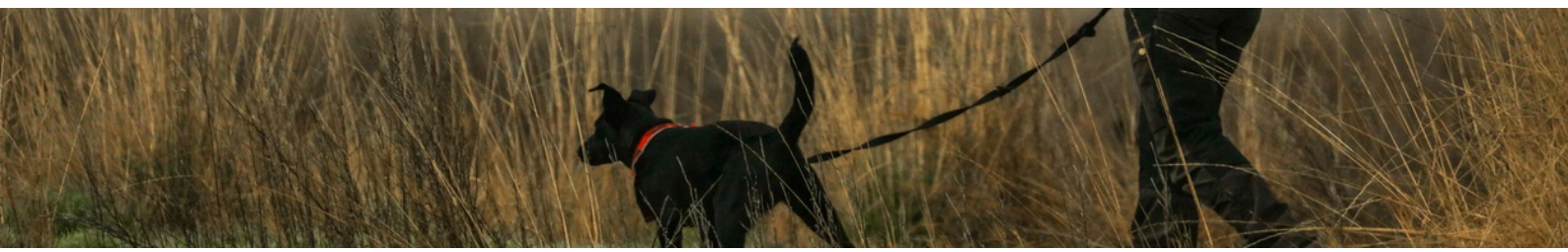
Lick mat or Kong -

- crack egg onto mat - microwave for 45 seconds, wait to cool, give to dog
- Allows the dog lick and work for their food, licking is a calming activity
- Other options - greek yoghurt, single ingredient baby food, peanut butter, meat mince

CHEWING

- KelpyBones/Benebones/BullyMake Chews/Happy Staffy Co Chews
- Cardboard boxes
- Bully sticks
- Goat horns
- Cow hoofs





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Enrichment 101

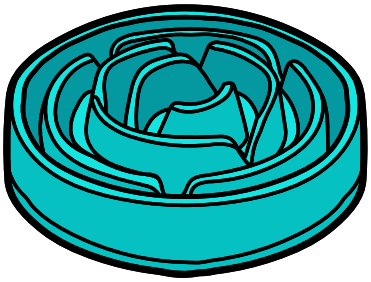
Adjustments to Daily Routine

- Incorporate enrichment activity throughout your dogs day
- Replace your dog's bowl for breakfast and dinner with a slow feeder
- Scatter your dogs kibble on a snuffle mat or the grass in your backyard
- Hand feed your dog! Use dinner as an opportunity to train and practice engagement

More Recommended Enrichment Strategies

Training Games -

- Head into your backyard or living room and practice recall!
- Using your dogs dinner or treats, ask your dog for simple known behaviours like 'sit', 'wait', 'come'
- Use these moments to teach new behaviours like a nose touch
- Reward your dog for sitting on their bed calmly
- Finish training session with scatter feed of remaining food



Slow Feeder -

- Mix up your dog's dinner and fill into slow feeder
- Option to freeze slow feeder make it more enriching for your dog
- Use slow feeders to make frozen snacks to keep your pup busy
- Use for crate training, mat training, or settle training



Puzzle Toys -

- Look at puzzle toys at your local pet store or Kmart
- Use small pieces of kibble or treats
- Start easy and show your dog where to start

Interactive Games -

- Tug of war
  - Key is to let your dog win and keep the game short to reduce any frustration

Scent-work / Nose-work

- Hide treats in the garden or house
- Teach your dog to sniff it out
- Recommend "The Doggy Lady"
- Hide & seek (you or toys/treats)
- Treat scatter in grass ("find it" game)



Let them dig!

- We can do this at the park, at the beach or at home.
- Shell pool + sand = Your dog's personal sand pit
- Pop some dried treats at the moment and encourage them to dig!

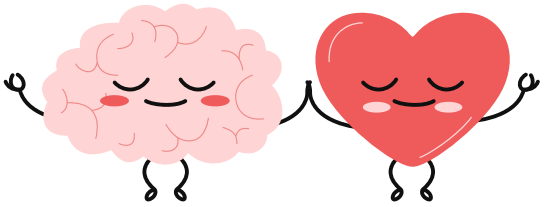
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Helping Anxious Dogs

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Create a Calm and Predictable Environment

- Set up a quiet, low-traffic area where your dog can retreat when feeling overwhelmed.
- Keep a consistent daily routine (mealtimes, walks, rest) to help them feel secure.
- Limit visitors and outings in the first few weeks to reduce overstimulation.

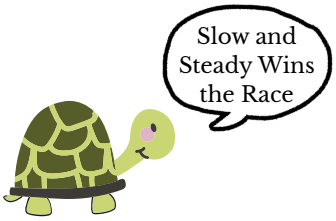


Go at their Pace

- Let your dog approach you—never force interactions.
- Use the "3-second rule" for petting: stop after 3 seconds and see if they ask for more.
- Provide multiple safe spaces (e.g., crates, beds in quiet areas) where they can rest undisturbed.
- Recognise your dog's body language to when they are uncomfortable

Reinforce Calm Behaviour

- Reward calm behaviours like settling, relaxed body posture, and choosing to disengage from stressors.
- Use high value treats and praise to reinforce positive experiences.
- Keep training sessions short and end on a positive note. SHORT AND SWEET!



Enrichment and Exercise

- Utilise each meal time for enrichment or a training session
- Offer mental enrichment (puzzle feeders, snuffle mats, food scatter games).
- Choose low-pressure walks during quiet times and in calm areas to prevent overwhelming your dog.
- Avoid dog parks and highly stimulating environments early on.

Avoid Punishment



- Never punish fear-based behaviours—this increases anxiety and breaks trust.
- If your dog growls, freezes, or tries to hide, they are communicating discomfort.
- Respect their signals

Work Together



- Track behaviour and note patterns or triggers.
- Consider working with a qualified force-free trainer or behaviourist.
- Use positive reinforcement to gently build resilience over time.

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Helpful Resources

Facebook - Positive Canines Dog Training
Instagram - PositiveCanines

<u>Educational Resources</u>
Podcast - Pick of the Litter
Podcast - Brain and Behaviour

Online Self-Paced Course
Mission Possible - Separation Anxiety Specalist
Melena DeMartini

CLICK HERE

Online Self-Paced Videos
Transform Behaviour

CLICK HERE

Book - Easy Peasy Puppy Squeezy by Steve Mann
Book - Don't Shoot the Dog by Karen Pryer

Youtube - IMDT Australia
Youtube - Fear Free Australia

CLICK HERE

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