

# Ward's Dog Training Presents:



## How to solve Separation Anxiety

It's natural for dogs to form a strong attachment to you or another animal member in the household. The question is, "when does that attachment become destructive?" Separation Anxiety is a condition in which the dog displays excessive anxiety when apart from the person or people and other animals it has attached itself to. Signs may include destructive behavior to themselves or items around the house, house soiling (even though the dog is housetrained), excessive vocalization, barrier frustration (where the dog focuses its destructive behavior at the door of their enclosure), and excessive restlessness at the owner's or animals departure. Often times this behavior is exhibited in the first 15-45 minutes of the owner's or animals departure. With patience, separation anxiety can be prevented, managed, and even go away with proper training and treatment.

There are several influencing factors that potentially trigger separation anxiety. Dogs are very routine oriented and changes to their routine can be very stressful for them. For example if your dog is accustomed to you being at home during the day and you begin a job where you are now gone during the day, or adding new permanent members to the household whether it be human or animals can trigger separation anxiety, as this further alters their everyday routine. When bringing a new dog or puppy into the house, is is often on a weekend and owners tend to spend a lot of time with and around the dog. Then the owner returns to work on the Monday and it comes as a shock to the dog being left alone.

Some physical and behavioral problems carry similar symptoms to separation anxiety: urinary tract infections, loss of bladder control, parasites, digestive disorders, geriatric cognitive dysfunction, puppy exploration, teething, hunger, incomplete house training, marking bad behaviors, phobias, and more. These problems should be ruled out with a health examination from a veterinarian or an evaluation from Certified Training Specialist before beginning any treatment for separation anxiety.

Prognosis in treatment of separation anxiety is fair to good, but is time consuming and requires a lot of patience by ALL members of the household. One of the first steps is to eliminate attention initiated by your dog. If your dog comes to you displaying behaviors in order to receive attention from you, you must ignore it until they stop and then YOU initiate attention when they are calm and

## Ward's Dog Training Presents:

reward for calm behavior. Obedience exercises like "Place", help this because the dog must remain calmly in their designated place (Which is a dog bed with distinct borders) until you decide to release or reward them with attention. Attention or release from their boundary must be done only when the dog is calm and quiet, otherwise you will be reinforcing the negative behaviors you are trying to stop. The dog can do anything on "Place" except for bark or get off. Another step is to separate yourself from your dog while you are home by utilizing a dog-proofed room or crate. Start with short periods of time and gradually build in increments ex: 5min, then 10, then 15 minutes etc. Both exercises help teach independent behavior in or out of your presence.

When arriving home or leaving, downplay your greeting or departure so it doesn't seem like anything your dog should become stressed over. Cues that show your dog you are leaving should be downplayed or performed in different sequences like opening the garage first instead of last grabbing your keys at a different time than normal. To help remove stress while you are gone find a toy that can be reserved to be given to your dog only when they are alone. Interactive toys that can be filled with food or treats work really well because they help occupy the dog in an activity that they can enjoy. Chewing is also an action that can offer some stress relief. This toy can act as a safety cue for your dog to indicate that you are leaving, but will return. It should only be given when you leave and picked up within 10 minutes when you return.

To help your dog get used to being alone, practice leaving the house multiple times a day/week. At a time you would normally be home get dressed like you are going to work and go through your normal departure routine, even giving your dog the toy that is reserved for when they are left alone. Then leave your house, but return in a few minutes. Also you might only start in the next room then move to another then outside of the house depending on how bad the separation anxiety is. Gradually increase the amount of time you are gone as your dog shows fewer signs of stress. For best results this exercise can be done up to twice daily and at least 3 times a week.

Separation anxiety can be prevented in new young dogs with planning. Instead of constantly spending time with them make time that they will be left alone in a crate or dog-proofed room. This will better prepare them not to develop separation anxiety. Establish a daily schedule for your dog that includes feeding, elimination, exercise, and training to accommodate their needs.

In extreme cases contact your veterinarian for advice on whether your dog would benefit from medication in conjunction to a behavioral treatment plan. Clomicalm is the only FDA approved medication for treatment of separation anxiety in dogs. It can aid in getting your dog into an appropriate state of mind that is conducive for training. Only use medicine with guidance from a veterinarian!

Separation Anxiety can be a daunting issue it can be dealt with thru diligence, consistency, & patience. A dog that is attached to you yet can also be independent is the best way to **"Enhance You & Your Dogs Lives"**.

For more pet solutions, information on products, & services please visit our websites below.