



Save the Dalmatians & Others Canine Rescue, Inc.

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SEPARATION ANXIETY

Separation anxiety occurs in dogs that are overly attached or dependent on a family member. The canine becomes extremely anxious and exhibits distressing behavior when separated from the owner, usually as the owner prepares to leave, or shortly after the owner's departure. Examples of distressing behavior include destruction (where the destructive activity is focused on the owner's possessions); vocalization (barking, howling or whining); soiling the house (note that dogs who eliminate when the owner is not at home may not be completely house trained, or may have a medical problem so seek veterinary intervention); restlessness; shaking; shivering; salivating; refusing to eat; or becoming quiet and withdrawn.

Most dogs with separation anxiety try to remain close to their owner (following the owner from room to room). Many crave a lot of physical contact and attention from their owner and often are quite excited and aroused when the owners return.

Where to Begin

Start with a predictable daily routine. Begin by making your pet's day calmer and predictable. Establish a daily routine so that your pet begins to predict when he/she can expect attention (i.e. feeding, play, exercise, training, etc.) and when he/she should be prepared for inattention (when your dog should be napping or self-soothing with his/her toys).

Provide an enriched environment for your pet (i.e. meeting your dog's needs). When interacting with your dog, make sure that you are meeting all of his/her needs for social interactions, play, exercise, training, and potty. Effectively, you should initiate enough regular interactive sessions, play and attention so that when you are done, your pet is prepared to settle down and relax. At this point, chew toys can be given so that your dog something on which to focus when it is time to settle.

Establish predictable protocols for rewards. If your dog has separation anxiety, your dog's favorite rewards are the attention and play that you provide; however, treats, food, play and chew toys are also highly desirable.

Train your pet to "settle". The goal of this training is for your dog to learn to settle comfortably on cue. Focus on having your dog in a settled down position or lying in his/her bed before you give any reward for good behavior (ignore attention-seeking behavior and casual interactions for the first few weeks of training, so it's clear to your pet that a settled response achieves rewards and attention seeking does not). Practice down stays and gradually shape longer stay times in the bed before attention, affection, treats or play is earned.

Develop an area for relaxation. Having a bed location in a room where your dog can be taught to rest, nap, sleep or play with his/her toys provides a secure area where your pet might settle when you're not home. Begin by training your dog to go to the bed/area and gradually shape longer stays and more relaxed responses in the bed/area before rewards are given. At first, you can take your dog to his/her bed as part of the training routine using a toy or treat as a lure. Over time, a daily routine should be established where the dog learns to lie in the bed after each exercise, play and training session to either nap or play with his/her own toys. Odors such as aromatherapy candles or a piece of clothing with your scent can help promote a relaxed response as they are associated with relaxation and owner presence.

Before any of your departures, provide a vigorous session of play and exercise to help reduce some of your pet's energy and provide a period of attention.

What If I Come Home to Destruction?

If your dog has been anxious during your departure and you come home to destruction, ignore your dog until he/she settles down (be patient as this could take up to 15 minutes). Your dog needs to learn that the faster he/she settles, the faster he/she will get your attention. Losing your temper or punishing your pet may only increase your dog's anxiety, making matters worse for future departures; and it certainly won't correct what has already been done.

What We've Used for Separation Anxiety (used singularly and in combination with one another)

Various *calming collars* (dog appeasement pheromones) recommended to us by a veterinarian colleague. There are several available at local pet stores, and we've had success with all.

There is also the *Comfort Zone (DAP) plug-in* that plugs in to a wall socket. It's like an air freshener for dogs in that it emits dog appeasement pheromones that are not detectible by humans.

"Rescue" is a holistic remedy for a pet's water (just a few drops). We've also had good luck with it and use it often when we transport animals on flights or long distances.

If your pet is good with wearing things, the *Thunder Shirt* work greats too.

Dirty laundry because a dog's sense of smell overpowers a human's sense of smell by 10,000 to 100,000 times. Dogs love anything they associate with you, especially your scent. They find comfort having things around them that make them feel you are nearby or remind them of you. These items provide feelings of comfort, connection, and safety. Give your pooch a special item that has your scent (i.e. a T-shirt) which will become a security blanket of sorts that he/she can have with him/her wherever he is.

Conclusion

The goal is to reduce your dog's anxiety level by training to instill a feeling of comfort in your absence. Remember, this can be a long process.

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