



Separation Anxiety

Dogs with separation anxiety often do not have the coping skills or confidence to stay home without a companion (usually their people). Many times people will get another dog thinking it will help, but that is not the solution. You must teach your dog to have confidence in being alone and must not exacerbate the problem with your behavior.

1. Leave and Return in a quiet, calm manner

Often people make a scene when they leave and return from their dog, which only makes the dog experience more anxiety. It is hard for people to not say “good byes” and “I will be back soon”, but by doing this you draw more attention to the fact that you are leaving. The big “I am home” announcements can worsen the problem as well.

To help your dog with separation anxiety, your departures and returns must be quiet and calm. If you must say good bye to your dog, do it 30 minutes before you leave when it is time to leave, then just go. When you return, wait 20-30 minutes before acknowledging your dog.

2. Be unpredictable

Do you always pick up your keys or purse right before you leave? Pay attention to the cues you give your dog that you are leaving. Once you recognize what you do almost every time you leave, then do those actions and don't go anywhere. By doing this you will desensitize your dog to those cues that you are leaving.

For example, if you always pick up your keys as you leave, you will pick up your keys then go sit on the couch. Do not make a big production of it. You will want to do this with all your “pre-departure” actions. If you put on a coat, then put on your coat and wash some dishes. The more often you do these “false departures” the quicker your dog will get desensitized.

3. Find a special treat

Your dog's anxiety is likely the worst the first 15 minutes that you leave. Find a treat that occupies your dog for at least 15 minutes (longer if possible). This treat must be very special and only given during departures. This treat must be so good that they don't care that you leave, or in some cases learn that they want you to leave so they get this treat. Treats or toys that involve food are usually best. Stuffed Kongs, Buster Cubes, flavored chew toys or rawhide and “puzzle toys” are all good options as long as your dog finds them irresistible. You will want to give this treat shortly before you leave, as they should be very involved with it as you exit.

4. Exercise

All types of anxiety can be helped with exercise. A dog with separation anxiety should be exercised in the morning and evening and (if possible) before departures. This can be a walk, ball in the yard, Frisbee, or any game that gets the dog tired. Preferably exercise sessions should be at least 30 minutes, but anything is better than nothing.

5. Training

Dogs with separation anxiety benefit from using their brain. The more they “exercise” their brains the better. If your dog already knows basic commands, then teach them tricks as well. Brief training sessions should be done daily and training should be incorporated into everyday life. Training your dog teaches him or her confidence and the more you do the better your dog will be. If you can find something you both enjoy, like agility, rally or obedience, you will find training more enjoyable.

6. Crates or kennels

Depending on what your dogs does during their anxiety will depend if they should be kenneled when left alone. Being in a kennel can make anxiety worse or make it completely better. A dog that is not used to a kennel should be trained that the kennel is a “good place” before left alone in it, as they can get very anxious if the are no accustomed to it. However, the kennel could be a life saver for a dog with anxiety if they could have a comforting space when they are alone. Dogs with separation anxiety can get so anxious that they jump through glass windows or chew electrical cords.

7. Medications

Medications are available for dogs with separation anxiety; however they should only be used under the supervision of a Veterinarian and must be accompanied by behavior modification (preferably with a behaviorist or a qualified dog trainer)

8. Dog Appeasing Pheromone (DAP)

There are recent studies showing that having DAP in the area that your dog spends the most time can help with Separation Anxiety. DAP can be purchased over the counter and must be used continuously to be effective. There are few side affects and is tolerated by most dogs, however it is not guaranteed to work.

Separation anxiety can be difficult for people to understand and correct in their dogs. The above are basic suggestions; however it is recommended that you get assistance from a behaviorist or dog trainer for more exact therapies that will work for your dog.

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