

Separation Anxiety

Separation anxiety is a form of severe distress that may be experienced by dogs when separated from the person(s) to whom they are most attached. This anxiety may result in problem behaviors that include episodes of vocalization, destruction, and elimination. Causes of separation anxiety include fear, anxiety, over-attachment to owners, and/or lack of appropriate interactions. The following recommendations can be implemented to help lessen anxiety.

Independence Training

1. The first step is to restructure the relationship between you and your dog to help lessen their anxiety. Implementation of "Leadership Exercises" is important for this transformation. All interactions are based on a command/response relationship to teach them to view all household members as leaders and to remain calm. Use reward-based training to teach them to obey commands (See Leadership exercises handout).
2. Remember to **ignore** all attention-seeking behaviors like jumping up, pawing, or pushing you with their muzzle. Only reward your dog when they are calm or when they are sitting. Keep a count of their attention-seeking attempts per day (on a calendar) to see if attention-seeking decreases over the next month.
3. Reduce shadowing/ following behavior in your home by closing doors and by using the sit/stay commands.
4. Your dog should not be allowed to sleep on the bed with you because it could make their over-attachment worse. For one week, let them sleep tethered on their own bed on the floor in the bedroom. The next week, try leaving them out of the bedroom on their bed or open crate.
5. Practice the "stay" training as well. Practice "stay" multiple times a day, gradually increasing the distance. Eventually, see if they are able to maintain their stay when you are out of sight. Once they master the stay command, you can make use of it to start the counter-conditioning to your departures.

Create a Safe Haven

6. Create a "safe haven" for your pet. You can lay a bed, mat, or crate on the floor, preferably not facing the door of the house/apartment. Practice having your pet go to this place on command several times a day. Feed them meals, and practice obedience commands on this bed or mat.
7. Dogs tend to prefer less light during the day when sleeping. It would be best to keep the house/apartment as dark as possible when you are gone. We recommend covering the front windows with cardboard to make it darker and to lessen the visual cues for your pet.

Departure Cues

8. Act out pre-departure cues (picking up keys, walking to the door) without leaving. Repeat this exercise 2-4 times a day until your pet does not respond to the cues with anxious behaviors.
9. Remove any emotional departures or greetings by ignoring them for 10 minutes prior to departure and upon returning home. On return, only give attention when they are calm and quiet.
10. Kongs (filled with treats or peanut butter) can be used upon departure, but make sure that you pick it up when you return.

Management

11. Minimize all anxiety- provoking departures. It would be best to take your dog in the car with you (if the weather is not too hot) or consider doggy daycare.
12. Daily exercise is an extremely important aspect of training, so try to schedule walks/ exercise prior to departures.
13. Your pet should be portion-fed twice a day. Leave their food out for five minutes, and then pick up their bowl until the next meal.

Pheromones

14. Dog Appeasing Pheromone (DAP) therapy can help lessen a dog's anxiety and is easily implemented. Try having your pet wear the DAP collar for a month to see if it can help lessen their overall anxiety.

MEDICATIONS:

Anti-anxiety medication can be implemented into your pet's treatment program to help lessen their anxiety.

The use a "Thundershirt" may also help reduce anxiety.

Leadership Exercises

Practice these leadership exercises as the situations occur throughout the day. They will help turn your pet into a confident, friendly dog that is eager to please all members of the family - adults and children alike.

Note: These exercises are recommended for use with dogs that are not aggressive toward people. If your dog growls, bares his teeth, snaps, attempts to bite, or shows any other potentially aggressive reaction in response to these situations, then don't do the exercise. A dog that feels threatened or challenged may bite and can cause serious injury.

DO	DON'T
Have your dog sit and wait while you go through outside doors first.	Let your dog run through the doorway ahead of you.
Have your dog wait for her meal until after people have had their dinner.	Let your dog eat before you or at the same time.
Teach your dog to accept being touched while he eats.	Avoid disturbing your dog when he is eating.
Gently move your dog out of the way if she is lying in your path.	Step around your dog or choose another route so she isn't disturbed.
Have your dog obey a request like sit before receiving attention.	Pet your dog whenever he comes to demand attention from you.
If your dog stares at you, stare back until he looks away.	Break eye contact first if your dog stares at you.
Pet your dog with long, slow strokes starting at the top of head and continuing to the shoulders.	Pet your dog with quick, short strokes across the head or face that get her excited.
Play games like fetch, with you in control of the toys at the end.	Play games like tug of war, where your dog is likely to win.
Teach your dog that hands are not appropriate chew toys.	Encourage your dog to bite your hands by playing games with his mouth.
Practice touching and handling your dog's feet, mouth and ears.	Avoid touching your dog's feet, mouth and ears.
Speak in a soft, high-pitched, praising voice so your dog is eager to pay attention.	Speak in loud, low tones-a firm, threatening voice so your dog knows you mean business.