

# SEPARATION ANXIETY

## PREVENTING & REDUCING DOG ANXIETY WHEN LEFT

### RECOGNIZING THE PROBLEM

Dogs form strong bonds with animals and people with whom they live. Most dogs can cope with separation from family members for a few hours. Some feel anxious, stressed even panicked when left even for a few minutes.

Some dogs are predisposed to separation anxiety because of their personality. Those dogs are anxious in a variety of situations not just when left alone. Some become anxious when left alone following an event they found frightening while you were away. This could be a sudden change in your schedule, a severe thunderstorm, loud construction noise on the street, a robbery or other unusual event. Some dogs have never learned to be alone when puppies and find it frightening.

When dogs feel anxious in your absence, they may:

- Urinate when you come home
- Vocalize when left alone, whining, barking or howling
- Be destructive when left alone
- Attempt escape, scratching or chewing at exits
- May show signs of stress with lack of appetite, restlessness, panting, excessive drinking, urination & defecation indoors

### TRAINING OPTIONS

While undergoing treatment it is best not to leave your dog alone in the place he usually feels anxious.

- Take your dog to work. Walk him frequently and have water available in a spill proof bowl.
- Leave him with a sitter or at doggie daycare
- Have someone stay at home.

If your dog has moderate to severe separation anxiety contact your veterinarian.

### LEARNING TO BE ALONE WITHOUT STRESS

#### Before you start

- a) Purchase a few special toys to be used only when doing the “hangout “exercise.
- b) Purchase a product called Dog Appeasing Pheromone on the Internet or from your veterinarian.
- c) Figure out which room in the house your dog is most relaxed, place his bed there, remove all destructible items and plug the Dog Appeasing Pheromones diffuser.
- d) Make a list of all the cues that normally make your dog anxious such as putting your work clothes on, or picking up your keys.

#### Step 1 - The hang out exercise

Most dogs with separation anxiety are “velcro” dogs, they follow their guardians from room to room. The first step is to teach them that it is safe to be out of their person’s sight.

First teach them a down stay in your presence and then gradually in very short increments of time begin to step out of the dog's view. Take your time with this and do not push to fast. You want your dog to be able to relax on his bed even when you are doing something in another room.

This first step should not be done on a workday. Do not do any of the cues that normally stress your dogs. Your departure from the room must be as matter of fact and casual as possible.

1. After a nice walk, take the dog to his favourite room, give him the special going away toy and wait until he settles down with the toy.
2. Say "stay" and casually leave the room for a few seconds. Leave the door open.
3. If the dog gets up and follows, work on longer down stay duration in your presence first.
4. If he stays, come back in and give him a treat.
5. Repeat the hangout exercise by gradually increasing the duration in 5-15 second increments until you are able to leave the room for about 10 minutes with the door closed and still have a relaxed dog when you enter the room. Give the special hang out toy only when working on these exercises

## **Step 2 - The hangout exercise**

Once the dog can be relaxed in his room with the door closed while you are in a different part of the house, it is time for step 2. Do not do this exercise on a work day and do not pick up keys, put coat on or shoes when leaving the house.

1. Begin the "hangout exercise" but this time leave the house for a few seconds.
2. Slowly increase to 30 minutes, it is critical to the success that you go as slowly as your dog needs. Watch you dog on the your phone via the app and always return before or if they show signs of stress of anxiety

## **Step 3 - Adding some cues**

Once the dog can be relaxed in his room with the door closed while you are out of the house for 30 minutes, it is time for step 3.

1. You can now add the cues that normally stress your dog while repeating step 1 of the hangout exercise. Add one cue at a time and keep the alone time to a few seconds. Picking up your keys and putting them in your pocket is a good one to start.
2. Once you are able to add all the cues and your dog remains relaxed with the door closed while you are busy in another part of the house, it is time to repeat step 2.
3. Slowly increase hangout time until your dog can spend four hours alone.

If your dog gets anxious when you add the cues, you may need to practice picking up keys, coat and shoes but without leaving the house. You may also need to slow down the process.

## **VETERINARY HELP**

Contact your veterinarian for support if you suspect your dog suffers from separation. Some dogs may not respond to behaviour modification and Dog Appeasing Pheromone alone. They may also need drug therapy.

## **CAUTIONS/REMEMBER**

Some dogs that chew or destroy property when left alone vocalize or get overly excited and pee when you return, are simply excitable dogs that get bored during your absence.

If your dog truly has separation anxiety when left alone you will notice the stress symptoms as you are getting ready to leave. Dogs that are bored need more interesting things to do, while dogs that are anxious need to learn slowly that alone can be OK and even fun.

Do not muzzle, crate (without reducing stress and slow habituation), tether or otherwise restrict your dog to deal with this problem. This may keep him from being destructive or vocalizing but it will make anxiety worse. The dog may become more anxious, self-mutilate or may develop a stress related sickness.

We recommend that your dog not be left alone for long periods during treatment, as this will slow the process.