

Does Your Dog Suffer From Separation Anxiety?

Dogs with separation anxiety experience anxiety, depression and distress upon being separated from their parent or care-giver. These dogs experience excessive worry or fear about being apart from their family members. Separation anxiety is an enormous problem for an estimated 10% of all puppies and older dogs. Since most dogs are pack animals and very social, they naturally desire to be with their family all of the time. They become very disturbed, agitated, frustrated and frightened when their “parents” are away from them.

Did you know that separation anxiety is the second most common reason dogs are euthanised and have been given up by their owners? Dogs experiencing separation anxiety may whine, whimper, bark incessantly or howl disturbingly. They may drool or salivate excessively. They may become destructive in all manner of ways such as pacing nervously, chewing furniture, ripping up carpeting and upholstery, scratching doors and windows, eating the baseboards, raiding the cupboards, and even going through plate glass windows. Eating through drywall, mutilating plants, eating wall paper, rummaging through garbage, chewing furniture in addition to urinating and defecating indiscriminately can all be manifestations or symptoms of a dog suffering from separation anxiety.

Most adult dogs (3-4 months and older) can be left alone for 8 hours or even longer if they have access to a yard for elimination. They may be bored and unhappy but do not become destructive or problematic. A dog with separation anxiety becomes agitated and anxious as soon as he realizes his family member will be leaving him. He may whimper and whine and physically “beg” you not to leave. His distress is obvious – he does everything in his power to dissuade you from leaving – hugging you, trying to leave with you, placing himself between you and the door. You finally manage to disengage yourself from him and get through the door, but you can still hear him whining, crying and scratching at the door as though he were a trapped animal.

There are many causes for separation anxiety in dogs. It can appear in those animals that have not been properly socialized. . It can also be a byproduct of or related to a traumatic experience such as a violent episode in which your animal has been injured; a natural disaster or frightening experience such as a fire, an earthquake, tornado or severe thunderstorm. Your pet may have been abandoned, neglected or abused, and is wary of being “given up”.

It is important to obedience train and socialize your dog. If your dog is still manifesting the symptoms of separation anxiety, it is important to consult with an animal behaviorist and/or veterinarian who can help you to determine if your animal does, indeed, have separation anxiety and to help you understand, train and perhaps, even medicate your dog in order to correct these behaviors and improve the quality of life for both you and your pet. There are many ways to effectively treat separation anxiety and ensure a successful outcome – one that is beneficial for you and your pet. I will discuss some possible

healing modalities in my next article, “How To Help Your Pet Cope With Separation Anxiety.”