

Treating Your Dog's Separation Anxiety

Many pet owners suffer severe anxiety and distress when they are separated from their animal companion. These pets play such a pivotal and vital role of our every day lives and routines, it is difficult for many of us to leave them behind, whether we are going to work or away on vacation or a business trip. We may do everything in our power to ensure that they are well cared for in our absence but, nonetheless, we worry about them and miss them. So many of us fail to consciously realize what a significant role these pets play in our lives and overall well being. We feed them, exercise and play them, go for walks, share holidays and vacations with them, and spend countless hours in their comforting presence.

Our pets, as part of our pack or members of our family have a deep love for and loyalty to us, their family. When we leave them, many, who are very attached to us, suffer from great stress, sadness, frustration and anxiety. In a previous article, I wrote about some of the many manifestations separation anxiety may assume in your pets. I would like to help you treat this condition. Recognizing some of the symptoms of your dog's anxiety is an important step in helping resolve this issue. Is your dog whimpering, whining, barking excessively, following your every move as you prepare to leave? When you are away, does he chew, dig, defecate or urinate arbitrarily? Does he lick himself howl, attempt to escape, self-mutilate, panic? When you return, does he display frantic, overly excited, effusive greeting behaviors? Does he stay as close to you as possible for as long as possible? There are many ways to overcome your pet's separation anxiety.

First and foremost, take this situation seriously. Your pet is not "acting" or "acting out" on purpose. He is genuinely fearful and concerned about being apart from you. You are his caregiver, parent, best friend and companion. He is dependent upon you for all of his needs.

Some of the ways you can treat your dog's separation anxiety are as follows:

Don't make a dramatic exit when you are ready to depart. Make it calm, simple, and matter-of-fact.

Practice leaving for only a short while and returning. Leave for longer periods each time, and greet your pet calmly and casually when you return.

Leave your dog in a safe and comfortable room with an article of clothing that has your scent.

Keep his special toys and blanket in this room. Provide him with a Kong or other toys containing treats like peanut butter or cheese in them. He can "work" on getting the treat from the toy.

Place him in a room with a window so that he can look out.

Leave the television or radio left on while you're away.

When you are home, keep your pet in rooms other than the one you're in for increasingly longer periods of time until he gets used to you being apart from one another. Make sure he has toys, and come in the room frequently to reassure him that you will always return to him.

Try to exercise or walk your dog before you leave home. A tired dog is generally a better behaved dog. Increase the amount of exercise he gets.

Get your dog accustomed to getting ready to leave cues, such as changing your clothes, getting out your keys, putting on your jacket. Repeat these actions without actually leaving home. Your pet will get the idea that you will be returning.

Consider taking your dog to doggie daycare or to a friend or neighbor's house while you are away.

Consult your veterinarian about drug therapy. Such medications as the tricyclic antidepressants, buspirone and benzodiazepines may help your dog get over his anxiety. These meds should only be used in conjunction with desensitization/counter conditioning work – teaching the dog how to deal with being left alone.” Reconcile” is a chewable, flavored tablet (fluoxetine hydrochloride) that you give your dog once daily to treat separation anxiety in conjunction with a simple training plan.

Homeopathic remedies such as the Bach Flower Essence mix, Rescue Remedy” may also help calm an anxious dog.

The DAP method is another alternative to helping your dog. It is a “plug-in” product that releases a chemical that is supposed to be a dog comforting hormone.

Keep calm and be patient. Discuss your dog's separation anxiety issues with a knowledgeable veterinarian. Having lived with many dogs that have had separation anxiety, I know that it can be treated and resolved satisfactorily. – for the benefit of you and your best friend!

