

SEPARATION ANXIETY IN DOGS

Separation anxiety is a term used for dogs which appear only to have issues when left alone or cannot get to their owner. A dog showing the symptoms of separation anxiety are usually a very normal much loved family member at all other times of the day or night.

Signs of separation anxiety are as follows:

Raised anxiety levels which lead to the following as an outlet for the difficulty the pet faces when the owner is not present:

- Destruction of property
- Mess (urine or faeces), even though dog is fully toilet trained
- Barking, howling, whining, sometimes neighbours will complain.

This is most common in puppies and young/rescue dogs adjusting to new routines and environments. It can also happen in family dogs which go through a change in daily routines or family life and also if their general health status changes.

The recommended methods of dealing with dogs which present any of the above are as follows:

For puppies and young dogs

- Environmental control ie, cage training to prevent them chewing valuable or human objects, or popping them in an area which is chew/scratch proof.
- Exercise- Preferably off lead or structured to allow maximum mental tiredness so the dog will sleep during the periods you cannot be with them.
- Food- offer part of a meal ½ hr after exercise to induce natural sleepiness before leaving.

- Do not make a fuss of the dog when leaving or on your return

If a **long term family dog** suddenly starts showing unwanted behaviour then please seek medical advice. If no medical reason is found to be causing the anxiety then the following can help- Spend time in the house with the dog in another area, quite frequently dogs who cannot cope on their own tend to shadow their owner from room to room without it being necessarily obvious. This can be sweet, but ultimately detrimental to the dogs mental state when you are not there for support.

To train the dog to spend time on it's own then start by asking your dog to stay in another room with the door open, baby gates can help with this. If the dog follows you, ask and return it. 2nd time use your body language to say or point that it needs to be in the other room. You may have to keep doing this repeatedly. Once the dog gets the message it will normally settle and watch you from a distance. You can invite the dog to join you but on your terms only and only when it is settled.

This is essentially stretching the bond and relationship your dog has built with you to an unfortunately unhealthy level. This



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level of attachment also has a detrimental

affect on the owner or family as it is distressing to know and watch your dog actually suffering from the raised anxiety when you are not there to support it.

Once your dog can cope with being in another room you can start to close the door, 1st by leaving it ajar and then closing it entirely. Wait for short periods and then go in but do not interact with the dog initially

Also give the dog plenty of exercise on a daily basis and leave a chew while you are out.

This takes time to overcome as it has usually taken time for the anxiety to build to an unacceptable level.

The other alternatives are:

- Stay at home 24/7
- Take the dog everywhere with you
- Hire a dog sitter
- Use boarding facilities short term to break the cycle initially
- Drug therapy

Rehoming a destructive dog can be hard and it does not initially stop the behaviour.

Some people opt for euthanasia as the changes to the lifestyle and the interaction they have built is impossible to

stop, but the behaviour is unbearable. An anxious dog is not a happy dog. It is never possible to guarantee a good result. However, with work and consistency from the owner the chances of improvement are much higher. Help is always at hand and you will have nothing to lose by seeking veterinary advice.

Care and Kindness For Your Pet
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