

SEPARATION ANXIETY

HOW TO HELP YOUR DOG FEEL SAFE WHEN ALONE

Separation anxiety in dogs is not bad behavior that should be punished. It is an actual panic attack experienced by an insecure dog that is overly attached to its owner and does not feel safe or secure when separated from that person.

Separation anxiety is a common issue that can be resolved with time and patience.

If your dog has a mild case of separation anxiety, counterconditioning might reduce or resolve the problem.

Counterconditioning is a treatment process that changes an animal's fearful, anxious reaction, to a pleasant relaxed one instead. To develop this kind of association with your dog, you may need to begin slowly by only leaving your dog for short periods at a time.

Encouraged Activities to Help Manage Separation Anxiety

- Walk your dog daily. Exercise is essential to reduce energy and anxiety levels. Dogs need to be exercised daily to help drain excess energy. Take your dog for a vigorous walk, get them out of the yard where they can smell and see new things. If the dog is still bouncing around when the walk is finished, play ball or go for another walk. A tired dog is a good dog!
- Consider doggie daycares or having a friend stay with your dog when you are gone and continue behavior training. There are a wide variety of doggie daycares and dog sitting companies that can accommodate your dog's individual needs.
- Have a special toy that you only give the dog when you leave and put away upon return. Kongs seem to work best as they are very durable and yummy food items can be placed inside for them to work out. Peanut butter is an excellent Kong filling! This gives the dog something to focus on instead of the fact that you are gone and stimulates their brain to keep them from being bored. You can place the peanut butter filled Kong in the freezer overnight to make it last even longer!
- Use consistent language. If the dog is fine when you leave him inside while you go to check the mail, what do you say to let the dog know you are coming right back? Use that word or phrase when working on desensitizing. The dog associates that phrase with your return and feels secure until you come back in.
- Have a consistent schedule for feeding, pottyng, going on walks, and playtime. Consistency breeds security, and having a schedule helps your dog know what to expect.
- Practice leaving for short intervals. Grab your car keys and go outside for 5 to 10 minutes. Then come back inside so your dog can begin to understand that you will be coming back. When coming back, do not get overly excited that you are back. You want to help your dog associate that it is not a big deal that you leave and not a big deal that you come back. Practice this multiple times a day and gradually increase the number of times you are away from home.
- Talk with your veterinarian. If the separation anxiety is severe, talk with your vet about anti-anxiety medication. This option is not a cure but may help in conjunction with behavior training. If your dog's separation anxiety is extreme, medication may be the best method to manage this behavior.



To Crate or Not to Crate?

Crate training can be helpful for some dogs if they learn that the crate is their safe place to go when left alone. However, for other dogs, the crate can cause added stress and anxiety. To determine whether or not you should try using a crate, monitor your dog's behavior during crate training. If you would like to learn about crate training, please reach out to HSHC to get more information.

Discouraged Activities

- Do not make a big production upon leaving or returning home. Ideally, you should ignore the dog for a while before leaving (15-20 min.). Upon return, do not greet the dog until it has settled down and all signs of excitement are gone. When the dog is calm, call him over and quietly greet him and go about your routine as usual. Dogs thrive off of consistency and routine.
- Do not rely on crate training to fix separation anxiety. In some instances, it can make the problem worse. If your dog has severe separation anxiety, they could get injured while trying to get out of the crate. Dogs that are already crate trained may do well in it, as they already consider that area their "den." If you are unsure about how your dog will do in a crate – you can start by placing a crate in a room and leaving the crate door open and see how your dog responds to it. Never use the crate as a punishment and reward your dog when they go in the crate on their own.
- Do not get another dog or companion animal and expect it to reduce separation anxiety. Getting another dog may not help your dog to feel more secure. Your dog's insecurity is linked to its dependence on you.

Separation Anxiety can be very stressful for both you and your dog. Try to remember that your dog is only reacting due to fear and stress – so try not to get frustrated with your dog. If your dog is experiencing extreme separation anxiety that is resulting in bodily harm, destructiveness, and the above techniques have not worked, consult with a professional behaviorist or contact the Behavior Manager at behavior@hamiltonhumane.com.



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