

# Managing Separation Anxiety

Dogs with separation anxiety may howl and bark for long periods of time when left alone, destroy windows, doors and anything around exit points where they saw their owners leave, urinate/defecate in your absence even if they are housetrained or have just been outside, or even try to escape to the point of self-harm when they are left alone.

Dogs with separation anxiety are typically very loving attached to anyone that they are stressed about being separated from. Dogs can experience separation anxiety when left completely alone, when a particular person leaves or even when separated from another household pet.

If you think your dog suffers from separation anxiety, contact a skilled behavior specialist or trainer to help you work through the process of retraining your dog. In some cases, you may need to consult with a Veterinary Behaviorist in the event that your dog needs behavioral medication to relieve your dog of the anxiety through the training process.

## Why Does Separation Anxiety Develop?

It can be common for dogs adopted from shelters to experience separation anxiety in a new home, especially if the new owners spend a lot of time with their dog at first and then suddenly resume a normal schedule of leaving the house to go to work. Some dogs may experience separation anxiety if they have spent a great deal of time with a person or another pet inside the home and then that individual is no longer around due to moving, change in schedules, or even death.

If your dog has a habit of exhibiting any of the most common behavior issues previously mentioned when you are outside of the home there is a good chance that your dog is experiencing stress and anxiety when left alone.

## What to Do If Your Dog Has Separation Anxiety

You should never punish your dog for his separation anxiety driven behaviors as this could further break down the dog's ability to recover from the stress of the being left alone. For minor separation anxiety issues you may be able to desensitize your dog to being left alone with the following steps:

- Leave your dog with an article of clothing that smells like you.
- Keep arrivals and departures calm. Do not acknowledge any frantic or excited behaviors during greetings or departures. You can acknowledge your dog by calmly petting him as soon as he is calm. Some people want to lovingly reassure their pet during these times but that will only make your separations even harder on your dog in the future.
- Play talk radio or a TV while you are gone.
- Leave new, interesting, and delicious toys or treats for your dog when you leave. With this method your dog will grow to appreciate your departures since they result in him getting a new treat to play with!
- Use Adaptil or Comfort Zone, products which are clinically proven to reduce stress related behaviors.
- Take your dog to doggy daycare a few times per week so that he can burn off some extra energy and rest on the days that he stays home.
- Have a dog walker visit your dog in the middle of his time spent alone.
- Exercise your dog before you leave; be sure to allow enough time for your dog to cool down after his exercise before your actual departure. After a period of exercise your dog's body will need an opportunity for the adrenaline from the exercise to dissipate before he is left alone.
- Train your dog to use a crate.
- Practice short departures starting with just a few minutes, then 5 or 10 minutes, then a half hour, and so on. These departures can be practiced in one day or over a few days as long as your dog is not overly stressed during the departures.
- If you notice your dog is stressed by the length of time you are away, reduce the time you are gone by 25% and try repeating the departure a few more times before increasing the amount of time again. If your dog experiences a stressful departure, end the departures for that day and resume in the next day or two.

## Moderate to Severe Separation Anxiety

If your dog's behavior does not improve, or if he is experiencing anxiety so great that he is causing great damage to your home or himself, contact a skilled behavior specialist right away. Living with a dog and treating a dog with moderate to severe separation anxiety will require diligent training compliance and a great deal of patience. It may also be necessary to find a way to never allow your dog to be alone whether that be you staying with your dog, recruiting a friend, relative, or neighbor to help you out when you need to leave or hiring a dog sitter to stay with your dog. In some cases, dogs with separation anxiety will need behavioral medication to deal with their anxiety.