

Separation Anxiety in dogs

Helping your dog feel safe and comfortable when left alone

Some dogs find being left alone very difficult. Separation anxiety can range from subtle signs of stress to significant distress or panic and may begin within minutes of you leaving. These behaviours are not spite, disobedience or a dog being “naughty” — they indicate that your dog is struggling to cope. With the right support, many dogs can learn to feel safer and more relaxed when left alone.

WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE?



PREVENT REHEARSAL OF DISTRESS

- Avoid absences longer than your dog can cope with.
- Arrange alternative care wherever possible during training.
- **Never let them “cry it out”.** Distress can worsen the problem.
- Use a camera to spot subtle signs of anxiety.

BUILD SEPARATION GRADUALLY

Help your dog learn, step by step, that being apart from you is safe and predictable.

- 1. START SMALL**
Begin with very short separations, such as being in another room or behind a baby gate.
- 2. INTRODUCE CUES**
Gradually get your dog used to everyday leaving cues (e.g. keys, coat, door) so they become unimportant.
- 3. BUILD TIME**
Once your dog is relaxed, start brief absences. Increase the time very gradually, based on your dog’s response.
- 4. VARY DURATIONS**
Practise a mix of short and slightly longer absences, rather than always increasing the time.

WATCH YOUR DOG, NOT THE CLOCK

Only progress while your dog remains relaxed. **If they show signs of worry, make the next step easier, not harder.**

USE A CAMERA

A camera can help you see how your dog is really coping when you’re away, including more subtle signs of anxiety.

Video footage can help determine whether behaviour when left alone reflects anxiety or another cause, such as boredom, frustration, pain or reactions to noises outside the home.

If you’re unsure what the behaviour means, speak to your vet or a qualified behaviourist for advice.

SPEAK TO YOUR VET IF YOUR DOG:

- becomes significantly distressed or panics when left
- attempts to escape or risks injuring themselves
- cannot eat, rest or settle during absences
- is becoming progressively worse
- is anxious in other areas of their life
- is struggling to make progress despite careful training.



✓ **The earlier you seek help, the better the prognosis!**

COULD PAIN BE PLAYING A ROLE?

A veterinary assessment is also important to rule out any underlying medical or pain-related factors that could be contributing to the behaviour.

BEHAVIOUR MEDICATION MAY HELP

Behaviour medication may be appropriate for some dogs and can work very effectively alongside behaviour modification, helping your dog to feel calmer and better able to learn.

Your vet or a Clinical Behaviourist will be able to advise.



NEED MORE HELP?

Behaviour concerns are often easier to address when support is sought early. Did you know most pet insurance companies cover the costs of clinical behaviourists?



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