



Separation Anxiety

It is not uncommon for dogs to occasionally feel anxious. Most dogs are able to work through this and feel secure in their environment whether their owner is present or not. Occasionally a dog may suffer from anxiety symptoms when their owner is away. **Most mild to moderate symptoms are usually worked out with reassurance and consistency in the dog's environment.** More severe symptoms which can include destructiveness or self-injury, may be more difficult to manage and time intensive to work through. **If at any time your dog is anxious enough that he is harming himself, busting out of a secure crate, or destroying furniture, walls, or flooring in the home it is time to call in a professional.**

Below are some recommendations to work on mild to moderate separation anxiety.

Symptoms of mild/moderate anxiety could include any of the following:

- Dog starts to get anxious when you get your coat, keys, purse, etc.
- Tries to leave with you when you exit the house.
- Whining, barking, or howling for more than a few minutes when you leave.
- If crated, they are destructive with blankets, or hyper-salivate in crate.
- Dog follows you from room to room when you are home.
- Dog urinates or defecates when you are away for short periods of time (even when housetrained).
- Shows anxious behaviors when you leave the room or go outside without them.
- Does not want to go outside without you.

The first thing we encourage you to think about is that your new dog is going through many changes in a short amount of time. EVERYTHING is new. The smells, sounds, people, schedule, and rules are all different. For some dog's adjustment seems to happen overnight, and others need a little more time. If they show some signs of anxiety when you leave it is not revenge for you leaving them, but really part of a panic response.

Tips for easing a dog's stress when you are away:

- Keep arrivals and departures low key. If you think it's a big deal, so will they.
- Leave your dog with something that has your scent on it such as an old t-shirt you have slept in.
- Play some relaxing music while you are away.
- Ensure your dog has something to do while you are gone such as a favorite toy, chew bone, frozen Kong. **Reserving these items for the times you are away teaches the dog that great things come when you leave!**
- If at all possible, try to make the first several times you leave your new dog alone less than an hour. This will allow you to evaluate what is happening while you are away and look for signs of anxiety.

- **Crate train your dog.** Some dogs prefer having the safety of a crate to help them feel comfortable while you are away. Confining to a room is also an option. This is especially important for young puppies and shy and fearful dogs. The crate should ALWAYS be viewed as a positive experience and not a punishment. Crating does not work for all dogs, so trial and error may come into play.
- **Make sure your dog is properly exercised!!** A tired dog is much less likely to experience distress. This may require some extra effort for working people, but is absolutely necessary.
- Invest in some durable, mentally stimulating items that you can leave your dog with. These should ONLY be given when you are away. Be sure they are safe since you will not be monitoring. Antlers, Kong's, bully sticks, and Nylabones are some options to check out.
- Feed meals in a slow feeder or puzzle feeder to engage their mind and make mealtime fun.
- If your dog is allowed to free roam, hide tiny treats around the house and let them find them while you are away. (If you have multiple dogs, use caution if they are serious about their food).
- If your dog enjoys the company of other dogs, doggy daycare can be a good option.
- Find someone to let your dog out midday and give them some exercise if you work long hours.

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Separation anxiety can be frustrating for all involved. Do not punish your dog for experiencing separation anxiety. This can actually cause more anxiety and will break down the relationship between you and your new dog.

If, after trying these suggestions, you are still experiencing undesirable behaviors in your dog, SUBMIT QUESTIONS by clicking the link under Ask A Trainer on the Behavior and Training page of the Wayside Waifs website: www.waysidewaifs.org.

Written by the Wayside Waifs Canine Behavior Team
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