

Separation Anxiety

Dogs that have separation anxiety will exhibit signs of stress a short time after they are left alone, typically less than an hour after their owner has left. The most common issues seen with dogs that have separation anxiety are:

- Digging or chewing at walls or windows
- Barking or crying
- Urinating/defecating inside, even when they are housebroken

Even dogs that do not typically show anxiety when left alone may do so after a sudden change in their routine, such as a move to a new home or after a change to the owner's work schedule.



How do I know if my dog has separation anxiety?

Dogs may be experiencing separation anxiety if they exhibit the following behaviors:

- The problem behaviors occur every time your dog is left alone, not sporadically.
- The dog seems panicked when you begin your routine to leave the house: pacing, panting, following you around from room to room.
- The dog seems panicked when you get home and is allowed to greet you.

What to Do If Your Dog Has Separation Anxiety

When your dog is experiencing a mild separation anxiety issue then the following may help resolve some of the issues:

- Make your departures and arrivals from the home uneventful and calm. Do not fuss over the dog when you are leaving, make it no big deal that you are coming or going—it's normal.
- Create a routine so that your dog has an expectation of what will happen. For example, feed the dog, take them outside, turn the radio on, give the dog a safe toy and then leave. Make sure you are giving turning the radio on/giving a toy each time you are leaving the house so the expectations are set—even for a short amount of time.



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For more severe cases of anxiety you will need to change your dog's association with being alone. This can be achieved by doing practice sessions of departure activities and leaving your dog alone for short times to build up your dog's tolerance to it. We recommend the following procedure:

- Begin by engaging in your normal departure activities (getting your keys, putting on your coat, etc.), then sit back down. Repeat this step until your dog shows no distress in response to your activities.
- Next, open your door and then sit back down. Again, repeat until your dog shows no signs of stress.
- Then step outside, close the door and then come right back inside. Build up the amount of time that you stay outside before you re-enter the house.
- When your dog is comfortable with you leaving for 30 seconds at a time then you can add in a cue word such as "be right back" when you leave and then returning within a minute or two. Remember, as in the notes above, do not make a big deal out of your return. Give him a low-key greeting and then continue with your life as normal.
- When you are working to modify the behavior, you should practice for a few 10-minute training sessions throughout the day.
- Build up the time you are gone until you are able to do 30-60 minutes at a time. Once you hit this timeframe, you generally will be successful in managing your dog's separation anxiety. Remember that most separation anxiety presents itself in that first hour after you are gone.
- This process will need to be practiced slowly for dogs with severe anxiety so remember to take baby steps! The time it takes to modify your dog's reaction to you leaving is dependent on how severe the anxiety is.



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