



Home Alone “separation” Anxiety

Dogs with “separation” anxiety have the anxiety in response during the owner’s preparations for leaving and/or within a short time (0-30 minutes) after their owners leave them. The most common of these behaviors are:

- Digging, chewing, and scratching at doors or windows to escape and reunite with their owners.
- Howling, barking, crying, and whining in an attempt to get their owner to return.
- Urination and defecation (even with housetrained dogs) because of distress.

Why does this happen?

We don’t fully understand exactly why some dogs suffer from this and, under similar circumstances, others don’t. It is important to understand that the destruction and house soiling are not the dog’s attempt to punish or seek revenge on his owner for leaving him alone but are actually part of a panic response.

How do you know if my dog has separation anxiety?

- The behavior occurs exclusively when he’s left alone.
- He follows you from room to room when you are home
- He is very well behaved when you are present
- He displays frantic greeting behaviors whenever you return even from a short trip away
- The behavior always occurs when he’s left alone, whether for a short or long period of time
- He tries to leave with you when you prepare to leave the house
- He dislikes spending time outdoors by himself

What can you do?

- Keep arrivals and departures low-key. Ignore your dog for the first few minutes, and then calmly pet him. Remember we are working on creating a calm state of mind when coming and going.
- Leave your dog with something that has your scent on it such as a t-shirt you’ve slept in.
- Establish a “safety cue” – a word or action that you use every time you leave that reassures your dog you’ll be back (like a playing radio or television, a safe bone or toy). Use your safety cue during practice sessions, but NOT when you leave for a period of time longer than he can tolerate or the value of the safety cues will be lost.

Teaching Down “bed” Stay

See Handout on Teaching a Bed or Mat Command

- This will help you build distance and duration of being out of site without actually leaving the house.

Desensitization Techniques

Teach your dog to remain calm during “practice” departures:

- Engage in your departure activities (grabbing your keys, putting on your coat) then sit back down. Repeat this step until your dog shows no distress in response to your activities and leave a treat in his “place” so if he chooses to go there, he will get a reward.
- Next, go to the door and open it, then close it and sit back down. Say “good boy” if he remains where he is or goes to his place.



- Next, step outside the door, leaving the door open, then immediately return.
- Finally, step outside, close the door, and then immediately return. Slowly get your dog accustomed to being alone with the door closed between you for several seconds.
- Proceed very gradually repeating each step until your dog shows no signs of distress. If at any time in this process your actions produce an anxiety response in your dog, you've proceeded too fast. Return to an earlier step in the process and practice this step until the dog shows no distress response, then proceed to the next step.
- When your dog is tolerating your being on the other side of the door for several seconds, begin short-duration absences. This step involves giving the dog a verbal cue (for example, "I'll be back,") leaving and then returning within a minute. Your return must be low-key: either ignore your dog or greet him quietly and calmly. If he shows no signs of distress, repeat the exercise. If he appears anxious, wait until he relaxes to repeat the exercise. Gradually increase the length of time you're gone.
- Practice as many absences as possible that last less than ten minutes. You can do many departures within one session if your dog relaxes sufficiently between departures. Scatter practice departures and short-duration absences throughout the day.
- Once your dog can handle short absences (30 to 60 minutes,) he'll usually be able to handle longer intervals alone and you won't have to work up to all-day absences minute by minute. The hard part is at the beginning, but the job gets easier as you go along. How long it takes to condition your dog to being alone depends on the severity of his problem.
- Use a dog camera with a treat function (furbo etc.) to not watch your dog all day but instead to reward your dog with high value treats (out of site) for calm/relaxed behavior.

Interim Solutions

While training, you should try to avoid leaving him alone to practice the anxiety behavior. You could try taking your dog to a doggy daycare, a neighbor or family member's home, or to work with you if possible.

What Not To Do

- Get another pet: this sometimes helps, but you may wish to try it out with a friend's dog to make sure first!
- Do not doat all over your dog when coming in and out of the house or make a big deal over your trips

Other important notes:

- Basic Training is always a good idea, but it won't directly help an anxiety problem. Home alone anxiety is not the result of disobedience or lack of training. It's a panic response. Work on going in and out of a crate while you are here rewarding the dog for relaxed body language and quiet/calm behavior. Work on crating going in and out of site such as in and out of the room.
- Try setting up a kennel/run (think shelter kennel) in your house instead of a traditional crate some dogs do better when left in a confined "safe space" instead of the confined space of a crate. You can set up this "safe space" with toys a cot or other enrichment items to make your time away stimulating and fun.
- Consider a super crate if you have to crate your dog which are known to be escape proof for dogs that like to destroy their kennels/crates when confined some great examples of these safe crate are Impact Dog Crates: <https://www.impactdogcrates.com/> and Ruff land Kennels <https://rufflandkennels.com/>