

## Separation Anxiety

Your dog is showing signs of separation anxiety. This means that he is uncomfortable being left home alone. Because dogs are social animals, it is not natural for them to be away from their social group (you) for long periods of time. However, most dogs can be left alone with no problems. Unfortunately your dog is not one of them and you will have to do some work in order to help him over his fear of being alone.

It is important for you to understand that your dog is being bad (barking, eliminating, chewing, etc.) when he is alone because he is anxious. It is not due to spite or revenge. Because of this, punishing him for chewing the couch or soiling the rug will only make him more anxious. Recognize that he can't help the things he is doing and decide that you love him enough to put the time into helping him.

The program described below will help you teach your dog to be okay when he is alone. Have patience. It often takes several months for dogs to get over separation issues.

Crate training is an option however, most dogs that are anxious when alone are more anxious in a crate. If you decide to crate train your dog make sure you put time into conditioning him to absolutely LOVE being in the crate before you leave him in there for the day.

Video taping your dog while you are gone can be very helpful so that we can determine exactly when your dog becomes anxious, how long he remains that way, and where in your home he has the most trouble. It can also help us determine where your dog is most comfortable so that we can start our counterconditioning in that area.

Dogs with separation anxiety do much better when they live in a stable environment with predictable schedules and consistent rules and communication. Try to decide as a family, what the schedule for feeding, walking, playing, etc. will be and how you will handle certain household rules such as access to furniture or certain rooms.

### Techniques to calm your dog

#### Rewarding Relaxed Behavior and Ignoring Attention-Seeking

The first step is to make sure you reward your dog for relaxed behaviors when you are home. Do not attend to any attention-seeking behaviors such as pawing at you, whining, following you around the house, etc. Ignore those behaviors. But when you see your dog lying down relaxed, praise him for that.

### Aerobic Exercise

It is critical that your dog gets plenty of aerobic exercise. Exercise not only dissipates anxiety and tension, but it releases calming neurochemicals in the brain. Remember, a walk around the block is not aerobic to a dog with his four legs. You will need to get your dog running. Either throw a ball or stick, play recall games, or food toss games but you must figure out a way to get your dog's heart pumping for at least 30 minutes each day.

### Products to calm your dog

#### Composure Chews

Composure is a natural stress reliever containing Colostrum Calming Complex (bioactive proteins) L-theanine (amino acid) and Thiamine (Vit B1).

#### Composure Pro

Composure Pro contains all the ingredients in the regular Composure with an additional ingredient called L-Tryptophan. Tryptophan is the precursor of the calming brain chemical called Serotonin.

#### Pheromone Therapy

ADAPTIL (Dog Appeasing Pheromone) can be helpful in reducing the anxiety your dog feels when alone. The product, which is a synthetic of the pheromone that a nursing mother dog emits, comes in three forms - plug-in diffuser, spray, and collar. I recommend the collar for most situations because it is on the dog at all times. The collar lasts for about 30 days and then needs to be replaced.

#### Thundershirt

Thundershirt may help your dog cope with the anxiety of being alone. The idea of the wrap is to provide constant pressure on the sensory receptors, which calms the dog. It is similar to the pressure technique used on autistic children. I suggest you desensitize your dog to wearing it before leaving it on him when alone. To do this, simply put it on in the evening when he is quiet. You can also put it on when you feed him or give him treats because you want to pair the wrap with something good. If you opt to try the Thundershirt you will add it to your program below once your dog is fine with wearing it.

#### Calming Music

Music has been shown to calm dogs so I advise you to play either classical music (at low volume) or the CD "Through the Dog's Ears" during these matt training sessions and later during your departures.

## Medication

We may need to discuss the use of medication with your veterinarian if your dog's separation anxiety is severe.

## Confidence Building

Daily training sessions will help to build your dog's confidence. Have at least two five-minute training sessions every day where you work on basic commands (sit, down, come, stay) and/or tricks (spin, shake, speak, roll-over). Remember - training should ALWAYS be positive, especially with anxious dogs. Use food treats as rewards (not as bribes). Performing behaviors on cue for food treats is a great way to build self-confidence in your dog. Clicker training is a wonderful training method that helps build self-confidence because it encourages the dog to think on his own ([www.clickertraining.com](http://www.clickertraining.com) for more information).

## Low-Key Departures and Arrivals

Usually when people have a dog with separation anxiety they often make a big deal before they leave the house "don't worry fluffy, mommy will be home soon", and a big deal when they come home. This does not help your dog with his anxiety, in fact it is feeding into it. When you do these things you are creating a huge disparity between the time you are home and the time you are away. Therefore I recommend that you do not have long good-byes or greetings. Keep them calm, controlled and short.

It is also advisable that you learn the signs of your dog's anxiety (whining, trembling, not eating, panting, pacing, ears back etc.). They usually begin before you actually leave the house. Resist reassuring him when showing these signs of anxiety or you may actually be reinforcing the behaviors.

## Habituate to departure cues:

Make a list of all the things that you do when preparing to leave the house that make your dog anxious. Perform these tasks (pick up keys, purse, brief case, make your lunch, put on your coat, etc.) several times a day without leaving. Work on one thing at a time until your dog no longer reacts to it, and then move to another trigger.

## Comfort Place

Your dog needs to have a place to go when you leave where he feels safe and secure. This might be his crate (although many dogs with SA can't be crated), his bed or even your bed. It doesn't matter where the comfort place is it just matters that he has one. Sometimes it helps to teach your dog that a specific bed or matt is the comfort place. If you want to do this see below insert on how to train your dog to "go to your matt".

## Matt Training

If you need to establish a comfort place for your dog you can teach him to "go to your matt", lie down and be calm. To do this, follow the below instructions:

Lure your dog to his matt with a treat - reward with a treat when he steps on the matt. Do this with the food lure 2-3 times.

Then lure with your hand without the treat (use the same hand motion) and say "go to your matt" as he is moving to the matt. Repeat this a dozen times or so from all different directions around the matt.

Once you have paired the cue "go to your matt" with the action a dozen times he should know the cue. Test it by asking him to "go to your matt" and then reward when he does.

Practice this over and over from all different directions and locations. Soon you will have a dog who runs to his matt when cued.

Next: ask for a sit on the matt then reward with a treat

Next: ask for a sit-stay on the matt -increasing the duration slowly.

Next: ask for a down on the matt - reward with a treat

Next: ask for a down-stay on the matt - increasing the duration slowly.

Soon you will have a dog who runs to his matt, lies down and stays when you say "go to your matt"

## Independence Training

Dogs with separation anxiety are often referred to as "velcro dogs" because they follow their owners everywhere. The first step in treating separation anxiety is to break this habit. This is hard for some people to do, but remember, you are trying to reduce the anxiety your dog feels when he is left alone and this is the first step. You can't expect your dog to be able to feel okay about being alone in the house if he can't even be alone in another room when you are home.

Start this by teaching your dog to "down" and then "down-stay" (asking him to do this on his matt is helpful). Add duration to the stay first with you standing right next to him.

Once he can stay for 30 seconds reliably, you can start to add distance - one step at a time. Work to get the other side of the room but go slowly with this training.

### Behavior Modification Sessions to teach your dog to be okay when alone:

If you are using the Thundershirt and/or the Adaptil spray - you should incorporate them into the below sessions.

Turn on the calming music and ask your dog to go to his comfort place.

### Introduction of the KONG

When your dog can lie quietly on her spot while you are a few feet away its time to introduce a stuffed Kong during the exercise. Fill a Kong with tasty food paste (liverwurst, cream cheese, canned pumpkin, peanut butter, etc.) and give it to her during the session. Always end the session BEFORE she is done eating the food out of the Kong. Just quietly walk to her, take the Kong, turn off the music and bring the Kong to the kitchen for storage until the next session.

You will slowly move closer and closer to the door of the room while she eats the food out of the Kong. Eventually you will move just outside of the room so that you are not technically in the room but she can still see you while she is eating the Kong. Make sure that you always come back before she is done and pick up the Kong and turn off the music. Soon you should be just out of view in the other room while she is eating the Kong. As you can see, the goal is for your dog to be able to calmly eat out of the Kong in one room while you are in another.

Repeat this exercise daily until your dog gets the game, relaxes on her place and calmly eats her Kong while you are going about your business in the house.

If at any point your dog gets up from her place to follow you out of the room, you are going too fast and/or you need better food inside the Kong.

**\*\* DO NOT** give the Kong or play the music when you leave for work at this point. This will ruin your ability to use these things during your planned departures because it will be another cue that you are leaving.

## Counterconditioning and Desensitizing to your absence

After you are able to leave the room for 15 minutes while your dog eats her Kong, you can begin leaving the house. *Leave by a different door than you usually use if possible during training and desensitization.* Get the Kong, put out the matt, turn on the music, give him the Kong and walk out. Come back inside in a few seconds (before he starts to get upset), take the Kong away, turn off the music and go about your business (don't say a word).

### *Establish a Safety Cue:*

It is often helpful if you establish a cue that means you are only leaving for a minute. This cue can be a simple phrase like "be right back". The safety cue tells your dog that this is the practice session and you will be right back. Eventually you will be able to give your safety cue when you actually leave for the day in addition to the other strategies.

Start to stay away for longer periods of time. Leave for one minute and come back, and then two minutes, etc., then longer and longer. Use a variable schedule for how long you stay away - 1, 2, 5, 11, 7, 2, 12, 1, 14 minutes - so that he will never be able to predict when you will return.

Once you can go outside and stay there for 5-10 minutes you will have to start adding other cues, like the car. Start by simply opening and closing the car door, before you return to the house. Do this several times. Next start the car; then pull out of driveway; then go around block, etc.

### **Go slowly!**

Do each step until you know he is not getting upset. Use a video recorder if you have one so you will be able to see his reaction. If he ever becomes upset, simply back up and stay away for a shorter time period.

When you have gotten to the point that you can be away for 30 minutes and he is no longer getting upset, you should be okay. At this point you should be able to leave him with his stuffed Kong and music on for all real absences. Don't forget to give the safety cue as you walk out.

This program has proven to work for many dogs. It is very time consuming and requires a huge commitment from you. The key is to go at your dog's pace. Do each step until he is no longer upset before moving to the next step.

## **IMPORTANT:**

While working through this program it will help if your dog is never left alone for long periods of time. Use a doggy-day-care or a dog sitter if you can and work on the program in the evenings and on the weekends. If you are unable to do this, put your dog in a small area (different from where he is left during the exercises), away from the windows and doors, where he can do limited damage, whenever you leave for extended periods of time (8 hour work day). Leave him with your scent (a t-shirt that you slept in works great).