

TO YOUR *Pet's* *Health*

REMOVE THE FEAR FROM *Separation Anxiety*

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Picture this....your loving and faithful four-legged friend, aka your dog, is once again right by your side. She has met you at the door with such excitement, and proceeds to follow you into the bedroom as you change, into the kitchen as you grab a drink, into the living room to sit and stare at you with adoration, into the bedroom as you grab a pile of laundry, off to the laundry room to start the load of laundry, back to the kitchen to do the dishes, and yes even into the bathroom. Ok, so this may sound like a very loving and loyal friend, but what if your spouse or your child or roommate were doing the same thing? ALL OF THE TIME!? This is not normal behavior and may be one of the first signs that your dog has separation anxiety.

Last month we talked briefly about some of the physical signs of anxiety like shaking, drooling, panting, overgrooming, whining, barking, or howling. With separation anxiety you will see these in addition to some of the following: dog trying to follow the owner out the door, escape attempts made through the doors and windows, soiling in the house while owner is gone, destroying the furniture or other objects in the house. These signs usually occur within the 1st hour after the owner has left their pet's side.

It is not always clear what causes a pet to develop separation anxiety, but often it begins with an event or environmental change that the dog finds upsetting. This may include a change in family dynamics (death/divorce/child going to college), a change in lifestyle (moving or rehoming), or even a change in daily routine (going back

to school or going from a part-time to full-time job).

It is very important to work with your pet as a young puppy to develop independence. Avoid paying attention to your dog if she is constantly following you. Train your dog to sit before petting or praising him. Spread the responsibility of caretaking to all family members. Teach your pup to lie down and stay in one place as you move freely around the home. This encourages independence. Give your dog a special treat to help distract them as you prepare to leave. Try to avoid doing the exact same thing that will signal to the dog that you are getting ready to leave. These are referred to as pre-departure cues: such as picking up your keys or putting on your shoes or coat. Crate training is always a great option because it provides a safe area for your dog to stay while you are away. However, crate training is a process and needs to be done at some point prior to you trying to leave the house. Your dog needs to realize that the crate can be a safe place and not just a place of punishment.

Once your dog has developed separation anxiety, there is a fair amount of work involved in training them to not act out. Many of the same techniques used for other anxieties may work with separation. However, it is never a quick process. Sometimes medications can be used to help in the training process, but this is something to be discussed with your vet. Always remember that with any anxiety your pet may have, they are not acting out in retaliation but out of fear.



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