

Separation Anxiety

Signs consistently seen in dogs with Separation Anxiety

- They follow and have an excessive attachment to their owner.
- They show anxiety as the owner prepares to leave.
- They excessively greet their owner upon return, and continue to seek contact.
- They do not commonly spend much time outside alone.
- They may have other fears or anxieties, such as to thunder or strangers.

Common signs they exhibit when left alone

- Vocalizing.
- House soiling.
- Destructiveness, especially doors and other exit points, as well as the owner's possessions.
- Depression or aggression, pacing, shaking, increased salivation, decreased appetite, and lick sores.

Causes

- Genetic.
- Lack of proper socialization between the ages of 3-12 weeks.

Behavior Modification Plan

1. Teach and practice calm behavior.
 - a. Teach your dog to sit, lie down and stay.
 - b. Practice the stay command for longer and longer periods, as you move further and further away. The goal is for your dog to stay lying when you are in a different room.
 - c. Avoid exceeding the anxiety threshold during practice.
 - d. Reinforce this behavior with praise and favorite treats.
2. Decouple departure cues.
 - a. For example, pick up your car keys and start walking towards the door, and then do the dishes.
3. 15-20 minutes prior to leaving, get everything set (lights off, etc.) and ignore your dog.
4. Give a favorite food-filled toy prior to leaving to create a positive association. Use this only when you leave.
5. When coming home, ignore your dog until (s)he is calm.

- a. No matter what you find when you get home. Punishment will be counterproductive.
- 6. Other helpful hints.
 - a. As you increase obedience training, you will see a decrease in anxiety by creating structure and expectations.
 - b. Ignore all attention-seeking behaviors. Reward only calm behavior.
 - c. You can try a DAP (dog appeasing pheromones) collar.
- 7. Finally, best results are seen with a combination of a behavior modification plan and antianxiety medication.
 - a. The antianxiety medication is used for at least 2 months. With good results some animals can be weaned off this medication.