



Separation Anxiety

Let's take a look at separation anxiety from your dog's perspective. You are the **most important thing in your dog's life**. Dogs are very sociable creatures and thrive on company for many reasons. If your dog had a choice he/she would spend every bit of his time with you. So it's only natural that when you go out, your dog can experience varying degrees of distress and anxiety. He becomes confused, vulnerable, doesn't know where you are going, why he can't be with you and if you will be coming back to him. When you are separated all he wants is to be reunited with his pack - which is you.

Punishment is never the answer to treating dog separation anxiety!

Does Your Dog Suffer From Separation Anxiety?

There's every chance your dog is suffering from a Separation Anxiety disorder rather than another dog behavior problem if:

1. Your dog gets really **worked up and anxious when you are preparing to leave the house**. Things like picking up your car keys or putting on your coat can trigger the behavior.
2. Your dog engages in **inappropriate behavior only when you are separated**. I expand on this topic further down the page, but behavior such as urinating inside, excessive barking and destructive behavior are common symptoms of Separation Anxiety in dogs.
3. Your dog follows you everywhere you go and **immediately becomes distressed** if he can't be near you.
4. When you arrive home your dog is **over the top with his greeting** and takes a while to calm down.

Why Do Dogs Suffer From Separation Anxiety?

There are many theories on this one. In some cases the cause or trigger can be pinpointed to a particular event, but often there appears to be **no explanation for the Separation Anxiety to commence**. What I can say is that Separation Anxiety in dogs regularly occurs:

- ▶ Straight after a **change in routine**. Such as your work hours changing or a family member leaves home. Remember dogs are creatures of habit and any changes can be very unsettling to them.
- ▶ If you have been on vacation or unemployed for some time and have been spending heaps of time with your dog. **When you go back to work** your dog becomes anxious and distressed.
- ▶ Unfortunately dog's rescued from animal shelters contribute a highly disproportionate number of Separation Anxiety cases.
- ▶ After your dog experiences a **traumatic event while on his own**. If a thunderstorm lashes your home while your dog is alone, this can trigger Separation Anxiety in the future.
- ▶ If your dog is rarely left alone and becomes overly reliant on his pack.
- ▶ When you move house to a new neighborhood.



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How Does Dog Separation Anxiety Manifest Itself?

- ▶ Barking
- ▶ Whining
- ▶ Licking
- ▶ Destructive Behavior
- ▶ Chewing
- ▶ Howling
- ▶ Panic Attacks
- ▶ Digging
- ▶ Inappropriate Urinating
- ▶ House Soiling
- ▶ Self Mutilation
- ▶ Escaping
- ▶ Diarrhea
- ▶ Loss Of Appetite
- ▶ Excessive Salivation
- ▶ Vomiting
- ▶ Jumping Through Windows
- ▶ Crying

What Can You Do To Help Your Dog Overcome Separation Anxiety?

The treatment administered to your dogs separation anxiety problem **depends on its severity**. You will find lots of theories and suggestions regarding the correct way to treat separation anxiety - I'll just inform you of what's worked for me.



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The 4 Step Program I Used To Fix My Separation Anxiety Problem

My dog Harrison developed Separation Anxiety seemingly for no reason when he was about 7 years old. He would start **digging and crying as soon as I left the house**, even if my other family members were home. My Veterinarian suggested this training process, it achieved the desired result but took plenty of time and patience.

Aside from the 4 step program listed below, I continued to practice the **general day to day duties of responsible dog ownership**. By this I mean things like providing a safe and comfortable bed, plenty of exercise and obedience training.

Harry would start to get anxious (his whole body would shake) at the very first sign of me leaving the house. This typically would be putting my shoe's on or turning off the TV or heater. It became a real problem for Harry, myself and the rest of my family, this is how we eventually solved it:

Step 1

Since Harry was always by my side when I was home I had to **slowly teach him that he didn't always need to be close to me**. I started out by ignoring his attention seeking behavior (jumping up, barking etc.) and then did some solid practice of his down stay. Little by little we extended the time and distance we spent apart, until he was happy to be alone for up to 30 minutes. Of course, we still spent lots of fun time together.

Step 2

The next step was to get him used to being outside when I was inside. Again we started off with very small periods apart and gradually lengthened the time over a couple of weeks. If you try this Separation Anxiety treatment make sure that you don't just leave your dog outside to get all worked up and stressed. The trick is to start out leaving your dog out for a few seconds, then going out and reuniting before he shows any signs of Separation Anxiety. Give your dog a treat or dog toy to keep his mind off missing you. **Only initiate contact with your dog when he is calm and quiet.**

Step 3

The next step in fixing Harry's Separation Anxiety problem was to **eliminate the distress caused by me getting ready to leave** the house for work. What I did was write a list of all the triggers that started Harry's anxiety. I then set about desensitizing him to these triggers. I'd put my shoe's on, and not go anywhere. Put my coat on, then sit down to read the paper. Pick up my car keys and just carry them around with me, jangling along as I went about my business. After a while (about 3 weeks) Harry barely offered a sideways glance at my shenanigans.



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Step 4

When Harry was completely calm in situations that would have unsettled him in the past, I left the house. At first I just stepped outside, shut the door and came back inside within 20 seconds - before he made a sound. Again this was a slow process, similar to step 2. I extended the time outside the front door and then graduated to starting the car, then driving around the block before I came back inside. You can provide a tasty treat to your dog on your way out the door, something that he can work on for a while. Harry's favorite was a frozen Kong stuffed full of peanut butter and a few liver treats, this eventually kept him occupied for hours. **Remember that when you return home, don't make a huge fuss.** Come inside, get changed, pour yourself a nice hot coffee, then greet your calm dog.

This process did prove effective for me and my anxious dalmation. All up the 4 steps took about 5 weeks to work through and fix Harry's Separation Anxiety problem. My Vet suggested that I supplement this training with some medication. I didn't go down that path, but it would have been my next step if required.

Whichever method you choose to treat dog separation anxiety, be sure to stick with it and don't expect any immediate results.

Other good separation anxiety remedies are:

- ▶ Toys that keep your dog engaged in your absence
 - Kong stuffed with frozen food (kibble & peanut butter, cream cheese, etc)
 - Toys that are filled with treat that fall out when rolled around the room
- ▶ Keep a radio or TV on
- ▶ Increase the level of exercise your dog gets before you leave (a tired dog is a relaxed dog)
- ▶ Use Rescue Remedy or other herbal homeopathic relaxing products
- ▶ Crate train your dog, as their own space can be a comfort. Do not leave crated if this causes more anxiety.
- ▶ Reinforce basic obedience like sit, down and stay. Make them stay for longer and longer periods of time gradually removing yourself from the room. Go slow and make sure positive reinforcement is given for tasks well done.
- ▶ Arrange for a dog walker or dog visitor to break up your dog's day.