

Mild Separation Anxiety and Prevention

Signs of Separation Issues:

- Consistently follows owner around like “static cling”
- Vocalization takes the form of whining, barking, and even howling
- House soiling (loss of control due to frustration and stress – not revenge...)
- Loss of appetite
- Self-directed behaviors
- Destructiveness due to frustration (not revenge...)
- Depression

Separation issues stem from Anxiety. Dogs with separation anxiety always follow their owners around the home, some more so than others. Given the choice, they will lie next to their owners in the evening as they watch TV, will accompany them to bed, watch them get up in the morning, follow them downstairs, and will want to go everywhere with them, including the car. Dogs with separation anxiety anticipate your every move. The pain of separation is mirrored in the joy of the reunion. Dogs with separation anxiety greet their owners exuberantly when they return to the home, sometimes taking five or ten minutes to settle down.

Prevention / Independence Training: To train your dog not to follow your every move. Also to be comfortable about spending time apart the owner... to stand on their own four feet. The express intention that the dog's new found confidence would spill over into times when the owner is away. Owner leaving = tasty chew bone or Kong filled with treats. Leaving = Yeah, good thing, nothing to worry about.

Distance and Space: Do not allow your dog to be completely dependent upon you. Create distance and space, not allowing him to accompany you every minute of the day. Give your dog his own bed to sleep in, ask him to stay in another room while you go about your daily household schedule.

Hellos and Good Byes: Never say Hello or Good bye. By doing this, you are actually giving your dog reason to be sad when you leave... Good Bye = sadness. When you return... Hello = thank goodness they're home!!!! Simply walk out the door when you leave and when you return, ignore your dog for 5-10 minutes before saying “hello”, and only when your dog is calm.

Throw your dog off: Vary the times of your normal daily leaving ritual. If you for instance: Shower, go in the bathroom to get ready, get dressed, put your shoes on, pick up your keys and then give a long sad goodbye - change it up drastically. Your dog is actually more perceptive than you might think. Does he start to mope when you get dressed or pick up your keys? He has made the connection of Keys = Sad goodbyes. Vary your ritual throughout the day. Pick your keys up 2 hours after you get home. Open and close the door for no reason throughout the day. Anything to make your daily ritual = Nothing.

Program for Mild Separation Anxiety – Rules:

1. Obedience Training should take place to instill confidence in the dog. The exercise should be geared toward distancing the dog from its owner: that is, having the dog sit or lie down while the owner moves farther away (opposed to recall command).
2. Owners should be the ones to initiate all interactions with their dog not the other way around – and should discourage their dog from following them around. If the dog follows you around, gently take the dog by the collar and escort it to a nearby rest area; say, a dog bed. Then instruct him to stay or lie down and should then be rewarded and praised for doing so.
3. Dogs with separation issues should be discouraged from draping themselves across their owner's lap while the owner is watching TV or sitting on the couch reading. This is done in a way similar to step 2. Redirect him to his bed and treat. This may take several attempts.
4. Sleeping in your bed. This is a hard one. You must separate your dog from you. He can be in the same room, just not in bed while treating Separation Issues. You can give your dog a blanket or pillow and redirect him to that spot. Treat him any time he lays in that spot instead of the bed.
5. Play tug of war and let him win. This builds confidence. If your dog starts to growl, you may have gone too far and back off this approach. (never play tug with a dominant dog)
6. The dog should be ignored 15 minutes before an owner leaves and for fifteen minutes following his or her return. This evens out the emotional roller coaster ride that these dogs otherwise experience with over emotional departures and exuberant greetings from owners when they come home. Never say Hello or Good Bye. Comings and Goings are to be kept "low key". They must mean – nothing or no worries.
7. Counter conditioning is used with step 6. This is done by putting down a "Kong" or bone filled with peanut butter. Pet stores also sell rolling, dispensing treat balls. To keep your dog occupied during that first 30 minutes you are gone, when most issues arise. Some dogs seem to look forward to the owner going out after this practice was started.
8. The dog should receive plenty of exercise and suitable rations for its level of activity.
9. If your dog snaps at you, even as a puppy, please address this issue RIGHT AWAY with a professional certified dog behaviorist. Do NOT let him/her proceed to get away with it. And please address it immediately.