



SEPARATION ANXIETY

Does your normally well-behaved dog go crazy when you're out? Do neighbors complain that he barks constantly when you're gone, even though you never hear him bark much when you're with him? Do you return to find a scene of destruction, or perhaps you return to a dog who's trembling and hiding or who runs to you and sticks like glue for 10 minutes or more? Do you have to race or outwit your dog in order to go to the bathroom by yourself?

You probably have a separation anxiety problem. It can be a major problem: a couple who'd had a baby and hadn't been out of the house together for over 6 months went out to a movie and dinner, then came back to find that their sofa had been totally demolished by their dog. It can be minor: your dog doesn't want to leave your side, for 10 minutes or more, right after you get home from work.

There are two ways to fix it: the easy and the more difficult. For the easy way, put your dog in his kennel - gently, with plenty of water, a couple of toys, and an old towel or sweatshirt with your scent on it (rub it over your body before you shower). Do this 10 minutes or so before you leave, and be sure to take him out to urinate and defecate first. Leave quietly; don't go over to the kennel and say bye-bye or slam the door. Turn off the overhead light. He may bark for a few minutes, but pretty soon he'll stop and probably nap until you get home. Dogs are den animals: they feel more comforted in a small, quiet, dimly-lit space. If your dog doesn't have a kennel, go to WalMart or somewhere and buy one. Those Pet Taxi things work fine; just get one big enough for him to lie comfortably or stand up and turn around, but not much bigger. When you get back home, let your dog out and immediately take him outside to urinate and defecate. Don't make a big deal out of being home: speak to him quietly and pet him gently if at all until he's been outside.

Why doesn't everyone use the easy way? Because if you're going to be gone long enough that your dog will need to urinate or defecate before you get back, it's abusive to make him do it in his kennel. Instead, put him in a room with an easily cleaned floor and remove any valuables that might get damaged.

A normally healthy adult dog can hold his urine and feces for about 8 hours. Young dogs can hold them one hour for every month old they are, from 2 hours at 2 months to 8 hours at 8 months. Dogs younger than 2 months may not be able to hold them for even an hour, and older or sick dogs may need more frequent potty breaks also. No dog should ever be expected to hold urine or feces for longer than 8 hours. Some dogs can, but don't expect it. Sometimes a dog will be so anxious that kenneling will cause diarrhea or vomiting; if that happens with your dog you can't use the easy method either.

Now, the more difficult method: you have to try to take the drama out of leaving and coming home. You're not using the kennel, but you will be using some of the same tricks. You won't be saying goodbye or giving a lot of petting right before leaving, nor will you be doing a lot of petting and excited talking when you return. Create a 10 - 15 minute window of calm and quiet before leaving and after returning, during which you'll avoid looking directly at your dog, touching him, or talking to him. Do all that before or after the calm period.



Some dogs are comforted by having a radio or TV left on with the volume turned to a quiet level. Others might be helped by a recording of your voice. There are dog toys with recordable sound chips: you can record a short message which your dog can replay by chewing on the toy. Chewing itself is calming to most dogs, so be sure to leave out a couple of toys that your dog likes. You can make the toys more interesting by pretending to play with them yourself for a few minutes now and then.

Some dogs will be fine with a really interesting toy. There are treat-dispensing toys which will dribble out bits of tiny treat or dry dog food as a dog rolls them around the floor. Go to **www.drsfostersmith.com** if you can't get to a good pet store. There are hard rubber Kong toys which you can coat with a thin layer of peanut butter or baby food from a Gerber's Number 2 jar only (the one without onion powder), then freeze. A dog will chew the Kong to get the good taste, and since it's frozen it'll take long enough for the dog to calm down and possibly get sleepy. These frozen Kong treats will be messy, so the dog should have them only in a room with an easily cleaned floor.

Some dogs will be bothered by a ringing phone. Unplug it before you leave, or turn the ringer off. Remember to turn it back on or to plug in when you return.

Too much light can be a problem. The house shouldn't be dark, but dim light is more restful. If you don't have dimmer switches, leave on a few small lamps rather than the ceiling lights.

For persistent cases, there are drug and herbal remedies you can try. Bach flower remedies - **www.preciouspets.org/newsletters/articles/bach.htm** - are drug-free, have no side effects, and are remarkably helpful in many cases. The best-known herbal tablet is Calms, and most pet stores stock it; or your dog's veterinarian can recommend a tranquilizer if you prefer a drug treatment.

If you need additional information or help, please contact me at 870 633 1190 or guarri2002@yahoo.com.