

SEPARATION ANXIETY? WHAT YOU CAN DO



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Separation Anxiety? What You Can Do.

Dogs are social creatures and can over-attach to a pet parent or canine housemate and become habituated to continual contact. When left alone these dogs may experience what is akin to a panic attack in humans.

A well-structured change in routine may break the cycle of anxiety if practiced carefully and consistently.

- **Sleep alone.** If you sleep with your dog in your bed -- stop. Snuggle together in bed if you like but when it's time to sleep, have your dog sleep in her own bed.
- **Make your arrivals home boring.** Deliver your greeting after your dog has calmed down.
- **Stimulate your dog.** Leave "home-alone only" favorite chew items and long-lasting food toys within a "dog zone". Provide a view of the great outdoors. Your dog could be suffering from a condition that is often mistaken for separation anxiety – boredom!

- **Practice frequent separations.** Start small and build confidence slowly and incrementally. Practice "sit/wait" and "down/wait" while you leave the room for just a moment. Keep your dog on the other side of a closed door inside the home for short periods each day.
- **Provide a comfort item.** Leave your dog with a worn article of your clothing, such as a sweaty T-shirt.
- **Desensitize triggers.** Turn triggers -- putting on your coat, picking up a purse or briefcase, and jangling keys into neutral events for your dog by preparing to leave but don't leave the house. In time, the triggers will lose their power to generate fear.
- **Don't punish.** It won't help but it will make an already anxiety-stricken dog even more insecure.

If you continue to have troubles or if your dog has more than one of the following symptoms seek professional help from a positive reinforcement behavioral consultant: sweating or wet coat, drooling, pacing, self-mutilation, trembling, incessant barking or crying, elimination in the house even though otherwise housetrained, chewing or scratching at windows, doors or plaster boards, attempts at escape to find you, frantic greeting although you were gone for just a short while, or persistent following. Separation Anxiety disorder treatment is one of my specialties should you need extra help.

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