

# SEPARATION ANXIETY



**When a dog becomes anxious** he barks, paces, grooms himself endlessly, chews, gnaws, marks territory, and/or digs furiously. Sustained anxiety produces metabolic waste; the dog has to “go” more frequently. *These are not housebreaking accidents; the stressed-out dog can't “hold it.”* True separation anxiety is typically seen in dogs that have been subjected to unstable environments. Dogs that suffer from separation anxiety need to be left in a cozy area of the home, small enough so the dog can't pace and dog-proofed so that nothing can be accidentally damaged. If you don't have such an area, use a kennel crate. Many dogs prefer to curl up in a tight dark den.

## Environmental Changes

- Practice leaving him in his crate or other designated area at first, even when you are home. Start by leaving him alone for five minutes several times a day. *Gradually* increase the time he is alone until you can leave him for two hours at a stretch. You are teaching him to stay alone when you do have to leave. Correct any unwanted barking or destructiveness - *do not let him out of the crate unless he is calm and quiet.*
- Keep the curtains and/or shades drawn. A dimly lit environment has a calming effect on most dogs.
- Leave a radio or TV on as “white noise.”
- Supply your dog with an ‘ONLY WHEN I’M GONE’ chew toy with your scent imprinted on it. Rub it between your warm palms. Give it to him as you depart and remove it immediately upon your return.
- *Leave matter-of-factly.* Put on your coat, pick up your keys and give the dog his chewy and leave. You do not want to emotionally charge an already loaded situation by smothering, hugging, and kissing.
- If you come home to destruction - *Do not discipline the dog unless you have walked in and caught him in the act of misbehaving.*

## Exercise

- Exercise your dog thoroughly before leaving. *An exhausted dog doesn't have much energy left to invest in chronic barking, digging, or trashing the house.*

## Professional Help

Consult a dog behaviorist or veterinarian. If your dog makes little or no progress after a week or so, or if the stress is so great that the dog is panting and heaving, salivating, vomiting, trembling uncontrollably or exhibits extreme escape behavior such as tearing at the door, jumping at/through the window, or digging up flooring.

## Use time buffers

Studies have shown that most dogs are at their destructive worst 20 minutes after you leave (when they realize they will be left without you for a while) and 20 minutes before you return (when they are excited about seeing you again). **Time buffers teach your dog to remain unemotional when you first leave or return home.**

Fifteen minutes before you need to leave put your dog in his designated space and ignore him. Do not correct any destructive behavior or barking, but do not play with him or talk to him other than to correct misbehavior. Do just the opposite when you return. Leave him where he is confined (or ignore him if he is loose in the house) for 15 minutes before greeting him. This will teach him that there is a cooling off period before he will be greeted.

Although it might seem cruel to ignore your dog when he is so obviously happy to see you, behaviorists recommend this method when you are having a lot of destructive behavior.