

DOES YOUR DOG HAVE SEPARATION ANXIETY?

by Carrie Donahue, DVM

Separation anxiety is a reality for many pets. But it's not your dog's fault. This all-too-common problem can be due to a predisposition of a dog's breed, or it could be brought on by a triggering event like a change in schedule or residence, or the sudden absence of a resident family member. Regardless of the cause, the goal is to optimize "alone time" success for your precious pup!

FIRST THINGS FIRST

If your dog is acting out or appears anxious, it's important to rule out other issues, such as incomplete potty training, marking, or physical impairments. If these are not the cause, separation anxiety is the likely culprit. Keep in mind that this type of behavior is not the result of disobedience or spite. It is not a time for punishment. Instead, it's time to take a positive attitude and spring into action.

RELEARNING THE CUES

Some dogs have "predeparture anxiety" and get agitated seeing their pet parent picking up the

keys, combing hair, or putting on shoes. Reduce the dog's anxiety by taking the time to change things up. Don't stick with predictable cues that you are leaving. For example, pick up your car keys and sit in front of the TV for a while. Show the dog that certain cues will not always lead to your departure.

You can also teach your dog through short "out-of-sight" absences. Have your dog sit or stay on the other side of a bedroom door. Start with a short time, and gradually increase the time your dog sits on the other side of the door before seeing you. Practice within the home, and then practice with an exit door to the house. Switch it up if you can. For example, if you always leave out the front door, try leaving out the back door.

Next, incorporate absences that last a little longer. Always behave calmly and quietly when going out and coming in, keeping the contrast very low between when you are home and when you are leaving.

It's also important to do a "time check." Have you been giving your pet quality time along with plenty of walks and exercise? These can go a long way in helping them have a happy, relaxed attitude.

ALTERNATIVES TO CHECK OUT

If your dog's separation anxiety isn't improving, consider taking your pup to a doggy daycare for a few hours per week. You might also try working with a certified professional dog trainer.

Another solution is to provide your dog with some supplemental relief. In a clinical study on animals, a specifically cultivated root extract of *Echinacea angustifolia* (EP107) was able to keep the animals calm without causing drowsiness. This isn't surprising since *Echinacea angustifolia* contains a compound that influences brain chemistry and eases nervousness. Taken as a supplement in tablet form, this breakthrough echinacea extract can relax and calm your pet in as little as 30 minutes. The recommended dosage is 20 to 40 mg.

Even if progress is slow, keep working with your pet. Over time, you can conquer separation anxiety! ■

SIGNS OF SEPARATION ANXIETY

Urinating or defecating

Barking and howling

Chewing and licking

Digging and destruction

Pacing and acting skittish

Hiding and escaping

Shaking and panting



Carrie Donahue, DVM, is a holistic veterinarian and owner of Full Circle Holistic Veterinary Care in Madison, WI. Her mission is to improve the lives of companion animals by empowering pet owners to use a common-sense, holistic approach to health and well-being.