pet active life™

Separation anxiety in dogs: how to overcome it

In this handy guide, we take a closer look at one of the most common dog anxiety problems, separation anxiety, and how you can help your dog feel happier when home alone.

What is separation anxiety?

This term refers to the state of distress your dog feels when separated from you, their owner. Untreated, separation anxiety can seriously compromise your dogs' welfare, and the problematic behaviours associated with it can affect the dog-owner bond.

The signs

Destructive behaviour

Toileting indoors

Excessive barking, whining or howling

Loss of appetite

Shivering, shaking or cowering

Other signs:

- Escape attempts
- Restlessness
- Attention-seeking behaviour
- Aggression (in extreme cases)

Did you know?

Separation anxiety is the most common psychological problem in dogs

Causes of separation anxiety

Simply put, dogs love spending time with us. Dogs are sociable animals with pack instincts, so enjoy being around other animals. But with lots of patience and support, dogs can learn to feel more positive about being alone.

The best time for your dog to learn that being alone is normal is during the 'socialisation period' – when your pup is 3–12 weeks old. It's crucial that a puppy learns to be by themselves at this point.

Some dogs might show signs of separation anxiety later in life, and there are many different reasons for this. Often it's due to a sudden change in routine.

Preventing separation anxiety

Stick to a routine

That goes for mealtimes, exercise, comfort breaks, play and rest.

Distract your dog

Provide a puzzle toy or long-lasting treat to occupy them when alone.

Plan time apart

If your dog's snoozing in the front room, go and spend some time in the garden, or make that trip to the shops last slightly longer.

Create a safe space

Put a cosy bed in here, some stimulating toys and some treats.

All of the above will help reinforce alone time as a positive experience.

How to treat your dog's separation anxiety

1. Talk to your vet about a Certified Clinical Animal Behaviourist. They'll give you a full diagnosis and a bespoke treatment plan.
2. Minimise the time that your dog needs to spend by themselves.
3. Never punish your dog's behaviour for things like toileting indoors or scratching at the wall – this could make things much worse.
4. Try a calming supplement that's especially designed to reduce stress and anxiety in dogs.

More than **30%** of pet dogs in the UK show obvious signs that they are anxious when alone*

But some experts suggest up to **80%** of dogs could be suffering in silence.

The good news?

Separation anxiety in dogs is treatable. Just be patient and things will start looking up for you and your pet before you know it.

*Blackwell, E. J., Bradshaw, J. W. D. & Casey, R. A. (2013). Fear responses to noises in domestic dogs: Prevalence, risk factors and co-occurrence with other fear related behaviour. Applied Animal Behaviour Science, 145, 15-25.

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