

SEPARATION ANXIETY

Congratulations on adopting your new family member!

Dogs with separation anxiety may bark or howl, be destructive, and urinate/defecate in the house when left alone. These behaviors typically occur when the dog is home alone. The destructive behavior tends to be centered around doors and windows because these lead to where the owner left from, or may be. Dogs often chew doorways or windowsills or pull up carpeting by the front door. Many dogs display signs of separation anxiety shortly after arriving in their new homes; however, most get over it. Here are some things you can do to help your dog adjust sooner.

Practice short departures. On your dog's first day home, start to leave the house for very short periods of time. It's very important to pay NO attention to your dog when doing these departures. First, just go in and out the door. If your dog doesn't panic, take the trash out or pick up the mail. Then leave the house for five-minute intervals. Then try ten minutes. If you take your car to work, be sure to drive your car away during these intervals. Over the first two days, try to progress up to 30 minutes. Make sure you allow your dog to relax between departures. If your dog panics, slow down. Wait a few hours before departing again, and make it short. The goal is to have your dog relax when left alone. If you are patient and don't go faster than your dog can tolerate, both of you will be happier.

Ignore your dog when you come and go. Making too big a deal of your departures will teach your dog to do the same. Ignore your dog when leaving, and don't make too big a fuss when you return.

Don't let your dog be a Velcro dog. Discourage allowing your dog to follow you everywhere. Staying in another room will help your dog learn that being alone isn't scary. Don't allow your dog to sit next to you all the time. Resting and sleeping, while not touching, will help your dog feel more confident when alone.

Give your dog a delicious and long-lasting chew before you leave. Although many anxious dogs won't eat when left alone, some will, and when they do, their anxiety is reduced. Leaving a very delicious chew may be something a dog just can't resist. Try a Kong toy or hollow marrow bone filled with cheese spread, peanut butter, or treats. Only give this toy before you leave. Pick it up when you come home.

Use the "Say Please" program. This is a program to teach your dog to politely ask for things before they are given. This is an easy way to become your dog's gentle leader and decrease your dog's Velcro tendencies. All you do is ask your dog to sit before you do anything for him/her and give praise after he/she sits. Instance: sit before being pet, sit before being greeted, sit before putting a leash on, sit before opening the door, sit before placing the food bowl down, sit before giving a treat, sit before throwing the ball, sit before getting in the car, etc.

Some dogs do better alone while crated, while others are more comfortable in a more open area of the house.

If you are not successful in minimizing and/or managing your dog's separation anxiety, please call us at 352-796-5062.