

# ***Info shared by Pitbull SA.***

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## ***Separation anxiety behaviour.***

Coping with destructive, obsessive and compulsive dog behaviors with separation anxiety.

### **What is separation anxiety?**

Perfect dogs, like perfect people are hard to find.

Separation anxiety is a dog's exaggerated fear over separation from its owners.

It is a modern, industrial age disease most often seen with our dogs.

Simply said, they are afraid of being left alone.

Separation anxiety is not the same as boredom, which can also result in chewing, pawing, digging, and other bad behaviour.

Separation anxiety begins as a panic soon as you leave and then boredom, after an hour or two.

All puppies show some signs of separation anxiety.

It's only natural for an infant of any species.

But as time passes, normal puppies show these signs less and less and become more confident about being alone.

It's worrying about your being away or about their being away from "the pack".

This is perfectly normal puppy behaviour – being alone and separated from the pack is out of line for "teenage" puppies.

### **What are the signs of separation anxiety?**

Fearfulness (worry, apprehensiveness), clinginess, hyperactivity, barking, yelping, destroying objects, urinating inappropriately, defecating in the house, vomiting, diarrhea, salivation, depression or aggressiveness when they are about to be left alone or think they are about to be.

Some over-eat; some under-eat.

Some twitch their ears, pace, pant, hide or jump and bounce about.

Some over-groom - licking or chewing on itself, resulting in bald areas on their skin tail and feet.

Some dogs can be left alone for no longer than a few minutes before they panic – look for you - and exhibit these behaviours.

Sometimes separation anxiety is caused by a change in schedule that requires the dog to be left alone for longer than normal.

Unidentified changes in older dogs may also cause sudden separation anxiety, which can be mistaken for senility.

What your dog is thinking is that it is about to lose its main friend and that you will not be returning.

It is preoccupation with this that sets off the cycle.

Separation anxiety is seen equally in male and female dogs, unneutered and fixed.

Age at onset in dogs is usually 5 months to two years.

### **What are the causes of separation anxiety?**

Some puppies at 5 months old, for reasons we do not entirely understand, retain their normal early fear of being left alone.

Perhaps these were puppies that were removed from their parents too young or whose mothers were unavailable.

Others come from families of dogs genetically prone to anxiety.

Some of these dogs because of a lack or over stimulation as puppy resulting in dependency.

Some of these dogs were abused (but only a small percentage of abused pets develop separation anxiety).

Social risk factors for separation anxiety include, poor maternal health, and neglect as a puppy.

### **The owner's personality types also play a part in this disease.**

In dogs, the remission rate with separation anxiety is fairly high – that is,

a lot of dogs are going to have good days and bad ones, good periods and bad periods.

Some fortunate dogs will cure themselves altogether with minimal help from you.

Older pets with separation anxiety may have difficulty moving to new homes, accepting new pets, babies and new situations in general.

But although we do not yet know the exact cause of separation anxiety, some risk factors are known.

Affected dogs end to belong to families that are close-knit.

The disorder often develops after a stress such as death or illness in the family, a move, a new baby or pet or changes in family structure.

Dogs and people with separation anxiety often have parents and siblings with separation anxiety.

If one human identical twin has separation anxiety, the other almost certainly does too.

The same pertains to litters of dogs – although with less certainty. Some pediatricians feel that these abnormalities might result from bacterial infections.

They call this syndrome PANDAS (Pediatric Autoimmune Neuropsychiatric Disorders Associated with Streptococcal Infection) – a good reason not to over-vaccinate your pets.

### **What are some of the non-drug therapies for separation anxiety?**

These non-drug therapies should always be the first-line approach when possible. Sometimes it is possible to improve separation anxiety without medications and sometimes it isn't. In some dogs, all that is required is to place the dog in a smaller space, a kennel or crate – a safe place of their own, where they can feel secure when you leave. If the dog panics when kenneled or crated, don't force it in - crating or kenneling of dogs for long periods can worsen the problem.

Try positive reinforcement techniques in teaching the dog that it does not have to be fearful and panic when it is left alone and that being alone is not such a bad thing. Do this by rewarding desirable behavior and ignoring bad behavior.

Cognitive behavioral therapy" graduated exposure or desensitization.

### **This has four components:**

- \* Recognizing anxious feelings in your dog.
- \* Reassurance in anxiety-provoking situations.
- \* developing a plan for coping with the situation.
- \* Evaluating the success of coping strategies and behavioral therapy.

### **Some practical steps to minimize separation anxiety.**

All attempt to teach your dog that it does not have to be frightened and panicky when it is left alone and to lessen its dependency.

- \* Teach your dog as many commands as possible.

Your dog should be able to “sit” “relax” and “stay” on command while you stroke and reassure them.

Each member of your household should participate in a “take charge” way because it is impossible to have happy, well-adjusted family dog if family members are below it in the “pack order” (social order).

The point of this training is teaching anxious dogs to relax and give it confidence.

Do the exercises in various rooms of the house and in the yard. Give out praise effusively and treats liberally.

\* Find a room or special safe space in your house or yard that is not easily destroyed.

Place the dog in it with some of the favorite toys and stay with the dog a while.

Then leave and shut the door promptly without fanfare.

When you return, a few minutes later, give the dog a pat and a favorite food treat.

Over days, repeat this; but each time stay away a little longer.

You may leave a radio or television playing but be careful about electrical cords.

\* Contingency management or unlearning.

Dogs know when you are thinking of leaving long before you do.

Perhaps it is because you put on your shoes, pick up your purse or car keys or put on your dress clothes.

If you can determine what the clues are that you give your dog, you can try to desensitize him to these clues by repeating them frequently but not leaving and by giving him a treat and praise when the dog behaves well.

When you have made progress, make your departures quiet and quick.

\* It might be that diet might play a part in separation anxiety.

There is no harm in offering your dog a diet that one leading manufacturer offers as a “brain food” (Prescription Diet Canine b/d)

or a hypoallergenic diet (CNM's HA or Hill's z/d).

\* Response prevention.

With some dogs, you can reduce dependency by spending less time with them for a training period of several weeks or months.

That means less eye contact, less verbal praise and less comforting, less commands and less scolding.

During these periods the dog should not be allowed to sleep in your bed or bedroom.

While doing this, never "reward" unwanted behavior by making a scene, scolding or interacting with the dog.

Always be mellow with your dog – mellow people tend to have mellow dogs.

The purpose of all this is to make the dog more self-reliant.

### **Other strategies.**

Do not make your departures a big production by hugging the pet and cooing over it because you are guilty about leaving.

This only makes the problem worse.

Try leaving through a back or side door. Departures should be quick and quiet. The Family should ignore the dog 20 minutes before you leave and 20 minutes after you get home.

\* Adequate exercise and play time.

Dogs need vigorous exercise once or twice a day.

A good plan is to take them for a walk or jog an hour or so before you leave for work and then give those 20 minutes or so to calm down before you leave.

### **\* Medications used to treat separation anxiety?**

#### **As last resort - drug therapy.**

Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRI's) - Clomipramine (Clomacalm) for dogs - may provide effective treatment of separation anxiety disorder and other anxiety disorders in dogs.

This antidepressant and anti-anxiety treatment will affect the way your dog thinks, feels, and acts.

They affect nerves that are involved in the regulation of mood, appetite, sexuality, sleep, aggression, obsessions, and compulsions.

They have remarkably few and mild side effects.

Some side effects are - dry mouth, sleepiness, dizziness, fatigue, tremors, and constipation.

Neither tricyclic antidepressants like Elavil nor benzodiazepines such as Valium have been shown to be more effective than placebos in children although some veterinarians do prescribe them.

**Dosage.** Technique for calculating dose is allometric scaling.

As with children one should always start at a dose, which is likely, too low (20%) and very slowly increase the dose until it is effective or one is satisfied that it will not work.

It can take several months to make a decision.

Brand Name, Generic Name Brand Name, Generic Name ... Anafranil clomipramine, Celexa citalopram, BuSpar buspirone, Inequan doxepin, Effexor venlafaxine, Tofranil imipramine, Luvox (SSRI) fluvoxamine, Wellbutrin bupropion, Paxil (SSRI) paroxetine, Zoloft sertraline, Prozac (SSRI) fluoxetine, Risperdal risperidone, Serzone (SSRI) nefazodone, Lexapro escitalopram – then noticed positive changes.

When separation anxiety is successfully treated, you will notice other changes in your dog.

They will usually be less tense, more carefree, enthusiastic, and less depressed. They may get a bit pudgy.

Don't feel guilty about using these medications under your vet's guidance.

There should be no more stigmas attached to them than aspirin - you are just treating a brain hormone imbalance.

Try to be content with improvements – not total makeovers.

### **Dogs are highly social animals that prefer to live in groups.**

Separation anxiety is a common behavioral problem that occurs when the dog is separated from their owner/s.

Separation anxiety is characterized by signs of distress when affected animals are separated from an owner or family group to which the animal is highly attached. Behavioral responses may include destructiveness, house-soiling, excessive barking, digging or pacing, among other signs.

The goal of treatment is to teach the pet how to be calm and relaxed during the owner's absence.

It involves changes in pet-owner interactions, changes in leaving and return protocols, decreasing the anxiety associated with owner departure, teaching the pet how to be left alone, environmental changes and management.

Owners should consult their veterinarian for advice.

They can either help you directly or they may offer referral to a veterinary behavioral specialist.

### **Changes in pet-owner interactions.**

The goal here is to facilitate the dog becoming more independent and less anxious.

It involves ignoring attention-seeking behavior and rewarding the dog for being calm and relaxed.

This behavioral therapy is vital to the treatment of separation anxiety.

### **Changes in leaving and return routines.**

In an attempt to decrease the level of anxiety that these dogs exhibit prior to owner departure, it is recommended that the owner ignore the dog 15-30 minutes prior to leaving.

Upon return, they are to greet the dog softly and quietly, and attend to the dog only when it is calm and quiet.

### **Decreasing the anxiety associated with departure.**

This involves changing the predictive value of pre-departure cues and re-teaching the dog that the 'routine' no longer predicts departure. This is accomplished through habituation, counter-conditioning and desensitization which are explained below.

Habituation is a decrease in response as a consequence of repeated exposure to a stimulus.

The goal is to disassociate the pre-departure cues from the actual departure.

Examples include picking up keys, putting on shoes, packing a briefcase, etc.

Using the picking up keys as an example, through habituation, the owner picks up the keys, the dog alerts, becomes anxious and comes to the owner; the owner ignores the dog and goes about their routine; the owner does not leave the house.

### **Consequently, the dog learns that the keys mean nothing.**

This is done with all of the pre-departure cues so that they no longer predict departure, which no longer leads to an anxious response, and become less important to the dog and easier to ignore.

With counter-conditioning a response is elicited that is behaviorally and physiologically incompatible with another response.

A dog cannot be anxious and relaxed at the same time. In the case of separation anxiety, the dog is rewarded for relaxation and the technique is used to decrease the response of the dog to departure cues.

For example, the dog is taught to sit/stay near an exit. If the dog is calm and relaxed, it is rewarded with a food treat or a pat on the head and vocal praise "good boy" "good girl".

This process is usually used in combination with de-sensitization.

In de-sensitization, the dog is exposed to a low-level anxiety-causing stimulus.

This low-level anxiety response can be easily interrupted and diverted. Gradually the intensity of the stimulus is increased, ideally without eliciting the anxious response. In the example of the owner getting closer to the door, eventually the owner steps outside the door, but returns quickly.

As the dog learns the task, the owner can increase the time away.

### **Environmental changes and management.**

Suggestions include increased play and exercise – taking the dog for a walk in the morning may help to reduce their anxiety levels when they are alone during the day; 'Doggie Day Care', organizing a dog walker to walk the dog during the day, 'mixing up' departure cues, masking departure with noise while dog is busy with toy in another room; providing food treats in dog toys so the dog can preoccupy themselves trying to access the food treat for a time or organizing a 'dog sitter'.

### **We suggest you have a look at the options available in your area and contact your local vet clinic for more information.**

In some cases, for example where the dog may be a danger to itself (e.g. a dog that causes serious physical injury to itself due to anxiety) veterinarians may suggest a combination of medication and behavioral modification/training to help the dog.

Pet owners should discuss this directly with their vet.