



SEPARATION ANXIETY IN DOGS



For many dogs, changes in daily routines are upsetting. Fido may start acting disruptive or destructive, especially when left home alone. He may go to the bathroom indoors, howl, chew, pace, or try to escape from the house. Accompanied by signs of panic or distress, these may indicate separation anxiety. ASPCA experts have put together a list of top tips for helping your pooch overcome separation anxiety.

Doctor Knows Best: First rule out any medical problems that might be causing your pet's behavior. For example, if your pet is urinating in the house, he might be suffering from a urinary tract infection, bladder stones, diabetes or kidney disease—all of which can cause urinary incontinence in dogs.

Conquer Fear: If your pooch suffers mild separation anxiety, counter conditioning—or helping your dog associate being alone with something good, like a tasty treat—might reduce or resolve the problem. To develop this kind of association, offer your dog a food-dispensing toy every time you leave the house.

Dogs Need Jobs: Providing physical and mental stimulation is a vital part of treating many behavior problems, including anxiety. Exercise can enrich your dog's life, decrease stress and provide outlets for normal behavior. Plus, a tired dog doesn't have much excess energy to burn when he's left alone!

Prepare for Departure: Many dogs know when you're about to leave the house. One way to tackle "departure anxiety" is to teach your dog that picking up your keys or coat doesn't always mean you're leaving. Try putting on your coat and just sitting down to watch TV instead of leaving.

Take Baby Steps: If your dog's anxiety is severe, try getting your pooch used to being alone by starting small. Begin by introducing several short periods of separation that don't produce anxiety, and then gradually increase time spent apart over the course of a few weeks.

Keep it Mellow: All hellos and goodbyes should be conducted in a very calm manner. When saying goodbye, just give your dog a pat on the head, say goodbye and leave. Similarly, when arriving home, say hello to your dog and then don't pay any more attention to him until he's calm and relaxed.

Say No to Tough Love: Anxious behaviors are not a result of disobedience or spite. Don't scold your dog if he doesn't overcome his fear quickly. If you punish him, he may become even more upset and the problem could get worse. Be patient until he feels comfortable and enjoys spending time alone.

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