

Separation Anxiety in Dogs

Our topics for this week are

- **Signs of separation anxiety in dogs**
- **Causes of separation anxiety in dogs**
- **Separation anxiety avoidance training**

Separation anxiety is a common but undesirable behavior of dogs. Signs can range from moaning when you leave them to incessant barking to destruction of window frames, door frames, furniture, clothes, or other owner possessions. Far too often dogs with separation anxiety are relinquished to a shelter or put on life-long sedation drugs.

To a young dog everything it experiences is a life-long lesson. In many cases, dogs are unintentionally trained to have separation anxiety by their owner.

Have you seen owners express great regret and provide lavish attention to their dog when they have to leave them? How about greeting them with a party-time, now-is-the-time-to-be-excited greeting combined with rough petting and patting? Then there is letting the dog sleep in their bedroom, or worse the owner's bed? All these practices teach a dog anxiety when separated from their owner, especially if put in a crate or room barren of mental enrichment when left alone.

It is best to train puppies that you leaving is a rewarding experience, how they can enjoy being in their crate alone, and that the moment you return is not the time for mind numbing partying. Training should begin after they are 8 weeks old. Puppies should stay with their mother and littermates until then to finish their family training, i.e. bite inhibition, dog play games, and other puppy lessons in growing up. So, between the ages of 8 weeks and 16 weeks is the best time to help them learn how to accept separation without distress.

First you need a crate that provides some seclusion from other distractions, such a clam-shell crate or a wire crate with a blanket cover. You also need to find a safe toy for chewing, a treat-hiding ball, and a puzzle feeder.

Providing some activity that expends pent up energy such as ball fetching just before you begin a separation routine is helpful. Teaching “sit” and short periods of “stay” before separation training is also of benefit. Training therapy may help some older dogs too, but not as well, or as fast, as with puppies.

Begin several trial short term separations (15 min to 4 hours) where they cannot see, hear, or smell you. Put a chew toy, treat-bearing hollow ball, and puzzle feeder with a little food in the crate. Treats and distractions should not be left in the crate when you are not leaving. They should be rewarding distractions just in your absence.

Do NOT talk and pet the puppy like you will never see it again before you leave. Act “matter of fact” not like you are terrible distress and leaving them forever. When you return, talk to the puppy in a calm adult-like voice while you remove the chew toy, treat-ball, and puzzle feed bowl for storage until the next time you leave. An especially happy voice and play time is best left for outdoor play.

By the way, sleeping alone without your presence is helpful in avoiding separation anxiety. It is also less stressful to all involved when they vomit, have diarrhea, drop gravid ticks into the house, etc. when these things happen in another room than your bed at 3 am.

Should a dog destroy property from separation anxiety, it should not be punished. Due to the time gap it will not be able to link the punishment to the crime. They will instead link it to your return to punishment, which will worsen its emotional instability.

If you have comments or you're interested in particular animal handling subjects, contact us at CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com

Now let's recap the key points to remember from today's episode:

- 1. Signs of separation anxiety in dogs is malicious destruction of owner possessions and property.**
- 2. Dogs are often unintentionally trained by their owner to have separation anxiety.**
- 3. Separation anxiety must be controlled in the owner and then the dog.**

More information on animal handling can be found in my books, ***Animal Handling and Physical Restraint, Concise Textbook of Small Animal Handling, and Concise Textbook of Large Animal Handling*** all published by CRC Press and available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Additional information is provided at: www.betteranimalhandling.com . This website has more than 350 past podcasts with notes on handling of dogs, cats, other small mammals, birds, reptiles, horses, cattle, small ruminants, swine, and poultry.

Don't forget, serious injury or death can result from handling and restraining some animals. Safe and effective handling and restraint requires experience and continual practice. Acquisition of the needed skills should be under the supervision of an experienced animal handler.