

# Preventing Separation Anxiety

Separation anxiety can be an extremely difficult behavior to deal with and lots of pets are surrendered to shelters every year for this reason. When you bring a new dog or puppy into your home you should consider what the life of your dog will look like long term. If long term includes periods of separation from you, as most long term pet owning relationships do, then you should set your dog up for success by preparing them sooner rather than later for what this will mean for them.

## Bringing Your New Pet Home

- Bring your dog home during a time when someone can spend a few days with them to ease their transition. In the first few days and weeks you will be getting to know each other so it is helpful to start to recognize your new pet's habits including eating, sleeping, playing, exercise, and potty habits.
- Keep the first few days low key. Even though it may be really exciting to have a new dog at home, avoid having too many visitors at first. Also, avoid taking your pet to every single new place you can think of since this can often be overwhelming for a dog making a new adjustment. Remember to think long-term and allow your new dog to settle in for a few days before introducing visitors and going on outings.
- Be sure to have prepared your new dog their very own quiet, safe place such as a crate in a quiet area of the house or their own dog-proofed room. Laundry rooms or spare bathrooms work well for dog proofing since there aren't usually a lot of things to tear up but introducing to a crate early on can help reduce stress later on if crating becomes necessary.
- When you bring your dog home, introduce your dog to all of their new spaces starting with their yard area, then in the common areas of the house, and finally their own space. Be sure your dog has had an opportunity to eliminate in their potty area and then let them rest in their dog-safe area for a little while. You can sit with your dog in their area for some low key play but then allow him to settle down. For some dogs, a chewy or some new toys is a good way to calm down. Pick up a book or watch a little tv while your dog gets comfortable in his new place.
- Stay close to your dog at first but don't fuss over him too much. When your dog is quiet and calm, you can praise him, give him affection or treats.
- Set a schedule and stick to it. If your normal routine involves you getting up early, set your alarm clock and go through your morning routine. Since you will be adjusting to your new normal, allow some extra time in your schedule for giving attention to your dog including potty breaks and meal times. During the times that you would normally be away from home, put your dog in his dog safe area for a few hours and allow him to rest. This will teach your dog what the natural schedule of your daily routine is and help him settle in when you return to your normal schedule. At first you may only want to leave your dog in his area for an hour or so but gradually build up to longer periods of time. Most dogs spend over 50% of the day resting or sleeping, puppies up to 75% of the day, so he will appreciate the down time.
- While your dog is in his area for his down time, occasionally step out of the house for brief periods gradually extending the time you are away. At first, just go check the mailbox or a brief visit outside. As you build up to longer periods you might consider going for a short walk or a drive around the block. After your dog has acclimated for a day or two, you can try leaving him for longer periods such as going to the grocery store or going to visit a friend for lunch.
- These departures will help your dog understand that you will be gone at times but you will return. For dogs adjusting to a new household it can be scary to be left alone at first so make sure you don't leave your dog alone too long at first.

After a few days of settling in, you should be able to return to your normal schedule. If you notice that your dog is not settling in as quickly or showing some concerning signs of distress when separated, contact us to speak with a behavior specialist. If your dog has a history of separation anxiety or isolation distress you could also speak to your vet about using supplements or medication to help.