

Separation Anxiety Treatment Steps



- **Get your dog regular exercise** before you leave him alone. Exercise includes getting your dog interacting in a way that gets him panting and taking deep breaths. Running or walking around the backyard or play with other pets in the home do not count for this type of exercise. Take your dog for a walk, jog, run, or hike. Play chase, tug, or fetch until your dog is tired. End play 20-30 minutes before you leave so your dog has a chance to wind down and relax.
- Five minutes before you leave, **give him a well-stuffed Kong** to take his mind off your imminent departure. See our [Kong Stuffing Recipes](#).
- **Make departures and returns very boring and emotionless.** Do not make a fuss or give your dog hugs or kisses before you leave. Just, matter of factly, collect your things and leave. Keep self talk or greetings or departures with other family members to a bare minimum too. If your dog gets excited when you return, ignore him until he has settled down completely, then say hello in a mellow way.
- **Desensitize your dog to your departure cues.** For example, pick up your car keys and then sit down on the couch and watch tv. Get dressed in your work attire then make dinner. Pick up your purse, briefcase, lunch tote, etc., walk around your house and then put everything down. By doing these things when you are not leaving your dog will reduce his response to them when you are going to leave.
- **Changing your departure routine can help reduce anxiety from building.** Vary your routine by taking a shower before you make coffee, put your things in your car before you eat breakfast, put your keys in your coat pocket or put them in your pocket before you get ready to leave. Reduce the predictability of your routine so your dog does not have the time to build up anxiety over a period of time before you leave.

Additional Resources

Please contact our Behavior Team to speak with a skilled behavior specialist.

BehaviorTeam@spca.org

214-461-5169

www.spca.org/petuniversity

- Patricia McConnell's booklet about separation anxiety called "[I'll Be Home Soon](#)" recommends **using a "safe" cue such as "I'll be back," only when you know you'll return within the time period your dog can tolerate.** When used only in those times your dog can learn to trust that he won't have to be alone for very long and therefore there is no reason to panic.
- **Consider having someone care for your dog when you are not home.** Doggy daycare is not for every dog but if your dog enjoys it then take him daily or a few times per week. Ask a neighbor or family member that is retired or home-bound to come visit with your dog or even come stay at your house during the day. Hire a pet sitter to come do a check in one or two times per day and exercise your dog or give him a potty break and some low key interaction.
- **If you are considering adopting another dog as a companion for your dog, consider borrowing or fostering another calm dog to see how your dog responds.** Avoid jumping into adopting another dog unless you are absolutely *sure* that is what your dog needs. Sometimes adopted a second dog can compound the problem with additional behavior issues or by the other dog mimicking the separation anxiety behaviors.
- **[Adaptil](#) is a pheromone diffusing products used to decrease anxiety in dogs by creating a calming effect.** These products are available in room diffusers, sprays and collars.
- **Remove as many other stressors from your dog's world as possible** to help him maintain his equilibrium in your absence. No choke chains, shock collars, physical or harsh verbal punishment (especially in connection to his anxiety behaviors).
- **Consider working with a behavior professional** to be sure you're on the right path - and to help you explore the possibilities of using anti-anxiety medications to maximize the effectiveness of your modification efforts. Visit www.sPCA.org/privatelessons to schedule an appointment with a Pet University trainer.