

SEPARATION ANXIETY

Dogs are highly social animals that prefer to live in groups. As a result some dogs can experience anxiety in response to their guardian leaving the house.

What do separation related behaviours look like?

Common symptoms of separation anxiety can include:

- Destructive behaviour when alone
- Urinating and defecating inside the house
- Excessive vocalisation such as howling or barking
- Escaping or attempting to escape the home or yard
- Other behaviours indicative of distress such as pacing, heavy panting or drooling

Symptoms can range from mild distress to severe panic episodes where a dog may cause structural damage or self-harm in an attempt to relieve their anxiety.

How can you help your dog?

Dogs who suffer from anxiety may need help to reduce their fear and panic before they can start to learn that absences aren't so scary. We recommend consulting a qualified Behaviour Veterinarian for advice as a first step.

The next step towards helping your dog to feel better about being alone is to begin exposing them to many short separations that do not produce anxiety, and gradually increasing the duration of the separations over many sessions.



While working to help your dog to overcome their fear it's extremely important that you don't expose them to a level of separation that causes distress.



Imagine that you had a phobia of snakes; a therapist would help you to gradually overcome your fear by slowly exposing you to snakes at a level that you could tolerate. You might start with a photograph of a snake across the other side of the room and gradually work your way up to the real thing.

In order to avoid sudden exposure to the situation your dog most fears, it is best to temporarily suspend absences and work to put a plan in place to make sure that your dog is only left alone when you are working on your short, planned, non-stressful absences.

How can you suspend absences?

Some ideas include..

- Enlisting the help of family or friends to keep your dog company
- Taking your dog to work with you
- Choosing dog-friendly stores and cafes
- Hiring a pet sitter, dog walker or enrolling your dog at a doggie daycare
- Contacting local retirement homes to see if they would like a visitor

Over time and with your support your dog can learn that being alone isn't so scary.