

Separation Anxiety in Dogs

Overview

- Separation anxiety is a common behavioural problem that leads to a dog to become panicked and stressed when they are left alone, or separated from their owner.
- It can cause a wide range of behavioural and physical signs, and have a big impact on your dog's quality of life.
- Treating separation anxiety involves training, lifestyle changes, gradually increasing your dog's confidence, and sometimes medication.

General information



Separation anxiety is a common behaviour problem that leads a dog to become panicked, frightened, frustrated, and stressed when they are left alone or separated from their owner. It usually happens when a dog is left at home on their own, but some dogs show signs when a particular person leaves them, even if other people are around. Separation anxiety can range from mild to very severe, and often has a huge impact on a dog (and their owner's) life. The good news is that with time, patience, and most importantly, the right training, it's a problem that can be significantly improved (and often completely cured).

Symptoms

Symptoms of a separation anxiety problem include:

- Barking/whining/howling
- Excessive drooling
- Vomiting
- Peeing or pooing in the house
- Panting
- Trembling
- Destructive behaviour
- Self-harm
- Chewing excessively
- Depression

Some dog's show obvious signs such as crying/peeing/pooing, or destroying items in the house when left. However, only show signs of a problem when their owners aren't around and appear perfectly fine when they return. If you are unsure whether your dog has a separation problem, you may need to consider using a pet monitoring camera, or ask a neighbour if they've noticed anything while you've been out.

Causes

There are many different things that can cause separation anxiety, including:

- **Past experiences** - if your dog has had a negative experience in the past when they've been left, (such as being scared or injured), they might think something bad is going to happen every time afterwards.
- **Lack of independence as a puppy** - your dog may struggle being left if they didn't gradually get used to being left alone when they were young.
- **Over-attachment** - if your dog is very attached to you or someone else in their household, they may struggle to be left.
- **Lack of security** - if your dog doesn't feel secure at home, they are likely to become anxious when they are left. Problems can also develop if your dog has had a lack of security in the past i.e. spent time in rehoming shelters, kennels, or has moved home several times.
- **Boredom and frustration** - boredom can lead to frustration, anxiety and destructive behaviour.

- [Noise phobias](#) - if your dog is afraid of certain noises, they may become anxious when left, especially if they hear the noise they're afraid while you are gone.

When to contact your vet

Contact your vet for help if you think your dog might have separation anxiety or you notice a sudden change in their behaviour.

[Am I eligible for PDSA veterinary treatment?](#)

Prevention and treatment

Helping your dog feel confident when they are alone by teaching independence at a young age is the ideal way to prevent separation anxiety. However, if your dog already has a separation problem, they will need professional help from a vet and an xxx accredited behaviourist. Treatment usually involves a combination of steps, such as:

- 'Behaviour modification' - special training techniques to help with the anxiety your dog feels when they are left.
- Adjustments at home - such as building your dog a den or safe place.
- Routine - a predictable pattern to the day can help reduce anxiety.
- Medication - some dogs need medication from their veterinary surgeon to help manage their anxiety.

You will need to work as a team with your vet and behaviourist, and be patient - most dogs will improve with the right help but changes take time.

[For more tips read our article 'Preventing separation anxiety'](#)

Published: Nov 2020