

You are getting back to normal post lockdown – What about your Dog?

It's likely that you and family members have been at home much more than usual during the lockdown, and your dog has enjoyed more walks, games in the garden and your company at home. You may have even bought a puppy or a rescue dog in the last few months. It's important to remember that dogs are pack animals and are happiest when they are with their human family.

Although dogs are now domesticated, this group mentality hasn't changed, so most dogs prefer it when their humans are home and the 'pack' is together.

However, as we gradually return to normal life, your dog is going to be left alone for longer periods and is likely to become unhappy and possibly stressed at not having you around. If your absence is not managed and prepared for, many dogs will develop **Separation Anxiety**.

Separation anxiety is a behavioural term for when dogs become stressed and frantic whenever they are left at home alone. Different breeds of dog can be more-or-less prone to experiencing separation anxiety and dogs who have come from rescue situations may also fall into this category.

WHAT DOES SEPARATION ANXIETY LOOK LIKE?

Dogs who are experiencing separation anxiety may display the following behaviours when left alone:

Vocalisation such as howling or barking

Destructive behaviour such as scratching walls and doors, or chewing furniture and other items

Going to the toilet indoors

Hyper salivating or panting

Increased heart and respiration rate

These behaviours are caused by stress and anxiety triggered by you leaving the house and can be very distressing for both us and our dogs.

Dog breeds that suffer badly from separation anxiety.

Separation Anxiety is possible in any breed, but these breeds have been bred to have strong bonds with humans, which makes them great as working dogs and companion animals, but also means that they are more likely to experience Separation Anxiety if their routine is suddenly changed as owners and families return to work.

1. Toy poodles: These dogs crave attention and company

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2. German shepherds: Researchers have found that German Shepherds are among the dog breeds who suffer the most from separation anxiety.
3. Havanese: These small Cuban dogs were pretty much bred to be the perfect family companions. Unfortunately this means that likelihood of separation anxiety is very high
4. Labrador retrievers: The most popular family dog: They really enjoy the time they spend around people. So when they're left alone—even for short periods of time, their separation anxiety can be intense.
5. Cocker spaniels/ Cockapoos – These are intelligent, busy little dogs who are very sociable and form strong bonds with their family “Pack” they find being alone difficult
6. Border Collies: These intelligent dogs are always looking for new ways to keep themselves busy. Their constant need for exercise, mental stimulation, and entertainment throughout the day often leads to severe cases of separation anxiety when their owners are away.
7. Bichon Frise: These little lapdogs love being with their owners and the sudden change in the amount of attention they receive while their humans aren't at home may be enough to give develop severe anxiety.
8. Australian Shepherds: These active dogs don't do well when it comes to boredom. When there's nothing left to do and being left alone it often leads to these dogs becoming quite anxious.
9. Cavalier King Charles Spaniel: As is the case with the majority of companion dogs, these spaniels dislike being left alone. They often struggle with anxiety especially if left with nothing to do.
10. Vizslas: Bred as loyal hunting dogs, Vizslas have often been referred to as a “Velcro dog,” meaning they love to stick by their humans' sides at all times. They go to great lengths to please their owners and find being bored and alone very difficult.

AVOIDING DEVELOPMENT OF SEPERATION ANXIETY

Prevention is always better than cure! And it is far better (and kinder) to prepare your puppy or dog well before you are going to be leaving them for long periods of time. It is best to start early or NOW and get your dog (or puppy) used to being left from the moment you bring them home. This way when you do leave the house it becomes normal and your dog knows you will return.

If your dog has already displayed symptoms of separation anxiety

- Please contact us for help as soon as possible. -

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We will work with you to set up a programme to help you and your dog. Every time your dog experiences separation anxiety it will increase the problem, most dogs gradually get more and more distressed, they don't work through this themselves. We can help you to implement a programme to build up your dog's confidence when alone, and the length of time it can manage alone.

If you are planning to leave your puppy or dog alone in the near future, follow this programme NOW.

Make sure that your dog has a quiet place to chill out during the day, and that children are not allowed to constantly cuddle the dog or give it attention. Most dogs spend many hours each day snoozing and it's important your dog is able to settle itself .

Try to mimic your work routine as much as possible, so that you dog knows it will be spending time during the day being expected to relax on its own. Make sure your dog has had a walk, and been fed, and has toys, radio, chews etc to keep it occupied.

To begin, leave your dog in a different room, this might be for only a few minutes, or even seconds don't make a fuss, just leave the dog with something to play with – a toy or a stuffed kong for example and leave the room.

When you come back into the room don't make a fuss of your dog, this needs to feel normal and no big deal. Try to time your entrance when the dog is calm, so you are not inadvertently rewarding your dog's whining or scrabbling at the door by returning

Make a note of how long you left the dog for. (It might only be seconds – a few minutes at first) Much better to start off with very small amounts of time and build up. Keep a record of how long your dog manages to be alone.

Build this up for longer periods – once your dog can manage around 15 minutes without bothering about your absence, you should start leaving the house. Choose the same place to leave your dog whilst they're getting used to be alone, this might be a crate for puppies, a certain room or the whole house. The main message here is to start as you mean to go on.

Don't make a fuss about leaving, don't say goodbye to your dog, and vary your leaving routine. Dogs are very intuitive and will quickly work out your leaving routine if you put your shoes on in the same place every day. If it helps leave a radio on.

On your return put your bag, keys, shoes away as normal before giving your pup attention. Don't fuss your dog, remember your absence is no big deal. If your dog jumps up don't reward this with attention, words, eye contact or hands. Ignore the dog until it gives up jumping and then you can say hello (calmly) and give a little stroke.

Individual dogs do better in slightly different situations. Some dogs like to be fastened in a crate because they feel secure, others are better with the crate open and in a small room. Some dogs do better with the run of the house, others are better in a small room. For puppies, make sure you remove anything you don't want them to chew, and that they have puppy pads or newspaper in case of accidents.

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Please contact us for help if you are struggling to build up your dog's time alone.