



Richardson Rescue

Animal Rescue and Adoption

Contact: Janet Richardson @ 803.684.6865

Separation Anxiety

By Jess Rollins

Separation anxiety occurs in dogs for very understandable reasons. They are highly social animals and when expected to spend time alone they can become, restless, nervous and depressed just as people can. While people may chew their nails, pace, eat too much, or sleep too much, dogs tend to either chew things (themselves included), try to escape, bark and have housetraining accidents (people tend to need to use the bathroom more often when they're nervous too!).

Dogs do not do these things out of anger or; "to get back at you for leaving", they are simply venting the nervous energy in a doggy fashion. For some dogs, being alone for a few hours is no big deal, but for others, even a few seconds is too much. It is similar to a phobia and just as you would work on a phobia for a person afraid of spiders is how we think about acclimating a dog to being left alone for periods of time in small, easy steps.

The most difficult part of this program is that it is extremely important not to proceed past the dog's comfort level. For example, if today your dog is nervous about being alone for more than 5 minutes, **DON'T LEAVE HIM FOR MORE THAN 5 MINUTES!!** Every time your dog is left longer than he is comfortable, the more the fear is reinforced. If you must leave your dog for longer than he is ready for, do not leave him in the spot you are working on as his long-term safe place for him.

Tips:

- Keep coming and going low key.
- Leave your dog in a safe environment (where he is not able to damage himself or the property).
- Use a voice activated recorder to help you to monitor his distress.
- Practice getting your jacket, keys, etc. at random times throughout the day!
- Practice positive training for tricks or obedience to help build his confidence. Our training aids may help.
- Make sure your dog has 30min - 1 hour of exercise per day.
- Reinforce calm behavior by giving him extra attention when he is relaxed.
- See your veterinarian to rule out underlying medical cause or for additional help. Sometimes medication is needed to help your dog get through this.
- Feed the healthiest diet that you can afford.



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Training Method:

Place your dog in his crate or pen and give him a raw marrowbone or stuffed Kong and move to an area that is just out of sight of your dog. Read aloud for 30 minutes while recording yourself. Take short breaks during this period, during which no sound will be recorded. Initially record 10 seconds of silence and build a variable increase of quiet time from there.

Continue with this as you can until you have created a 3 hour long tape.

Your next step is to place your dog in his "safe" area, give him his chewie and turn on the recorder. When he seems to be calmly engrossed, leave the room, get your keys and exit your home for just a few minutes. Return to the room at the end of a gradually increasing time period. When you return, switch off the recorder and calmly enter his area. Ignore him until he is relaxed. If when you return you see signs of anxiety, cut the time you leave in half next time. If when you repeat, he's still experiencing separation anxiety, cut your time in half again! Once your dog is no longer anxious, start increasing the times again. This is best to do on a vacation, but if that is not possible, start on Friday evening before the weekend. It will speed up the process if you begin this protocol by leaving him in an environment that he has not been left in before, i.e. if he had previously had a bad reaction to being crated, leave him in a different doggy-proofed area. If you know that you must leave him for longer than he is ready for, don't leave him in this new area. Use the original "bad" place or better yet, find some way to take him with you or leave him with a friend or at a doggy daycare. If the weather is cool you may be able to leave him in your car during errands. Gradually build up to being able to leave the house for the whole 3 hours with the tape on.

A little extra help:

- Try the other products in our Anxiety product section.
- Get another dog (be very careful about his option).
- Ask your vet about prescribing calming medication.
- Use "calming signals", described in the book with the same name by Turid Rugaas.
- Leave your dog with a bit of clothing that has your scent on it.