



My dog cannot be left home alone!



Separation anxiety (SA) is one of the most common behavioral problems reported in dogs. It can even happen when the owner is home, but the dog is unable to easily reach him or her.

With patience, the following steps can make it easier to soothe an anxious pup.

Dogs with SA experience distress when home alone or when “virtually” separated (i.e. you are still home, but your dog can’t reach you). Common signs include household destruction, escape attempts, drooling, shaking/trembling, vocalization (whining, howling, or barking), house soiling or vomiting.

Who is affected by it? Any dog can show signs of separation anxiety but most at risk are those like shelter dogs, that may be left abruptly without a chance to acclimate. Separation anxiety is just as common in multi-dog households as in single dog homes.

How do you know if your dog has separation anxiety? Consult your veterinarian about signs you are noticing. Use a webcam to watch for signs of stress while you are away (panting, whining, scratching, inability to rest). You can then share the video to aid in the diagnosis. Your veterinarian will want to rule out any medical causes for the behaviors before a diagnosis of separation anxiety is made. Your veterinarian may also recommend some lab work if medications are needed.

How is separation anxiety treated? Anxiety interferes with learning, so treatment usually includes both medication and behavior modification. *There is no place for punishing a dog with separation anxiety.* Punishment-based training creates more anxiety and fear in anxious dogs and often exacerbate separation-related behaviors.

There are a variety of medications that are available to help manage separation anxiety and the selection will depend on the severity of the problem in addition to any other anxiety or behavioral issues your dog may have.

Behavior modification can teach your dog to feel secure in your absence. The process introduces very short

departures that are gradually lengthened at a pace dependent on the dog’s success. Putting the dog in a crate often exacerbates the problem, and many dogs do better when they are not so closely confined. Providing a food toy such as a stuffed Kong in all practice sessions can prepare the dog to relax when alone.

Dogs are social creatures who need physical exercise. When these needs are met, there is trust, and if separation is introduced gradually enough, most dogs can be left alone without anxiety.

Signs of distress can begin to occur earlier, in response to cues that suggest you are leaving such as putting on your coat or shoes, or grabbing your keys.

Dogs that have separation anxiety are more likely to experience additional behavioral disorders, such as noise or thunderstorm phobias, so it is important to identify all behavior problems. If multiple behavioral disorders are present, or your dog’s separation anxiety is severe, your veterinarian may recommend a visit to a veterinary behavior specialist, who can create a detailed treatment plan specifically suited to your dog.

Don’t wait! Seek help early so your dog does not suffer. For help with an anxious dog, talk to your veterinarian or **FIND A VETERINARY BEHAVIORIST** [here](https://dacvb.org).