

A lot of us make the mistake of not helping our new dog develop the valuable life skill of being alone. Of course we want to spend time with our new dog, but many dogs coming from shelters or rescues will “hyper bond” with us if we don’t introduce the concept of being alone from the beginning. Separation anxiety can result.

The signs of separation anxiety in shelter dogs include:

- Destructive behavior such as digging, chewing, scratching, urinating or defecating in the house (despite being house trained).
- Destructive behavior when left alone, regardless of the length of time.
- The dog follows you from room to room, never letting you out of his sight.
- The dog displays frantic, exuberant behavior upon your return home.
- The dog reacts with depression or signs of anxiety when you prepare to leave.
- The dog dislikes being outside alone.

The best way to make the transition from a rescue to your home as easy as possible on your new best friend is to have patience. Dogs are considerably more relaxed and responsive to learning and following routines and rules when they are in a secure, non-threatening environment.

The following tips will help to ease the transition and help relieve symptoms of dog separation anxiety.

- Practice low-key departures and arrivals: Keep all of your departures and arrivals as low-key as possible. Although it may be rather difficult at first, it's important to completely ignore your dog for the first few minutes after arriving at home. Once a few minutes have passed, calmly and nonchalantly pet your dog keeping your voice low at all times.
- Practice makes perfect: It's important to practice departures and arrivals, gradually building up the amount of time you are gone. Begin by gathering your things as if you were leaving; keys, coat, purse, or whatever it is you normally do before leaving, and then sit back down. Repeat this practice until your dog no longer shows signs of distress.
- Offer comfort: When leaving the house, leave your dog with an article of your clothing that you've worn recently. Your scent will offer comfort and a sense of familiarity.
- Establish a routine: All dogs, not just those who have lived in a shelter, are happier and more well-adjusted if their owners have established a daily routine.
- Establish safety cues: In a calm voice, say the exact same thing to your dog every time you leave the house, just a short sentence that you'll use every time you leave, such as telling them to guard the house, or that you'll be right back. It's not the words you say, but the calmness that accompanies the words and the consistency with which you use them.
- Don't leave your dog home alone in a crate unless you have been working on crate training. Learn how to crate train your dog.
- Make your schedule as consistent as possible. Remember, it is not fair to get upset if a dog has an accident after being left alone a long time. One popular solution: hire a mid-day dog walker.

When you first bring your dog home, should you spend the whole day with her? No - this is one of the biggest mistakes dog adopters make. Instead, have her bed, safe chew toys and water in the confined area in which

## ADOPTED DOGS AND SEPARATION ANXIETY

she'll stay when you're gone - whether it's a crate or in a gated-off kitchen area. Take her to that area, tell her to lie down, give her a chew toy and a treat and praise, using her name.

Next, step away. If she remains quiet, good; don't talk to her, because that will distract her from this desired behavior. Before she begins to grow restless, take her back outside again to play or walk.

Return her to the crate, then go into another room for longer periods. Next, leave the house and come back in right away. Gradually make those trips longer and longer; vary the duration you're out. Your dog will be less anxious as she learns that when you leave, you eventually come back.

Give her a treat while she's in the crate, and talk to her while she is in the crate, so she'll come to accept the crate. By being reliable, you'll gain her trust.

A dog that is exercised and mentally stimulated is a good (and happy) dog. Before you leave your dog for extended periods, exercise and play with her. Then, for 20 minutes before leaving the house, go about your business calmly - then just leave. Other than your standard departure sentence ("guard the house" or "be back soon") don't make a fuss saying good-bye.

Learn more about separation anxiety by reading "Separation Anxiety vs. Containment Phobia" by Karyn Garvin.