



SEPARATION ANXIETY

Dogs, like us, are very social animals, but our lives mean that they do need to be left alone at times. Here is some advice to help you feel more confident about leaving your dog at home.

TIP: Also refer to our "Crate Training & Learning To Be Left Alone" information sheet.

SYMPTOMS

- Your dog becomes distressed as soon as you leave.
- The first 15 minutes are the worst, during which time your dog becomes extremely upset.
- All the physiological signs of fear may be present - an increase in heart and breathing rate, panting, salivating, increased activity and sometimes, a need to go to the toilet.
- Your dog may try to follow you as you leave, scratching at doors, chewing at doorframes, digging at carpets or jumping up at windowsills to look for a way out.
- Alternatively, your dog may bark, whine or howl to try and persuade you to come back.

- After this frantic period, your dog may settle down to chew something that you have recently touched that still carries your scent.
- Dogs will often chew scented items into small pieces and curl up in the debris so that your dog forms a 'barrier' of your scent around them for security.
- On your return, your dog may appear elated and become very excitable.
- They may be wet, either from salivating or excessively drinking due to stress.
- When you are home, your dog may attempt to follow you wherever you go in the house.
- They may begin to display anxious behaviours when they see you preparing to leave the house (e.g. panting, pacing).

HOW TO GET YOUR DOG USED TO BEING LEFT ALONE

It's a good idea to get your dog used to being left for short periods even if you don't intend to leave them. You never know when an emergency might crop up, and if they are not used to being left alone, they may become very distressed

Prepare the space

- First, decide on a place where you are happy to leave your dog alone. Many people choose kitchens or utility rooms due to ease of cleaning up any accidents.
- Make sure that wherever you choose is not somewhere where they only go when they are left alone, so that they don't associate that area with isolation.

- You want them to be as relaxed and comfortable as possible. Make sure there is a bed and water in this area.
- Stair gates are great when helping dogs get used to being left alone. They aren't as scary as a closed door and they still allow your dog to see, smell and hear you.
- Crates are also a great tool here - refer to our "[Crate Training & Learning To Be Left Alone](#)" information sheet.
- Many dogs also find having a radio on low comforting - talking stations are preferable to music stations.

[Training](#)

- Randomly during the day, close your dog in the area you have decided on with a tasty chew treat or toy and go about your normal business in the house.
- After a few minutes, open the gate and allow the dog to come out if they wish.
- You should not make a fuss of them when you let them out. The aim is that they stay calm throughout.
- Over the period of a few days, start to extend the time that they are left in the designated space.
- Always take your cues from the dog - if they are calm, extend the time further, if they are distressed, take it more slowly.
- Once your dog is comfortable being left in the designated space while you are still in the house, start leaving the house.
- Again, for a few minutes to begin with and gradually increasing the amount of time up to about half an hour.

- If your dog shows any sign of worry, take a few steps back and start from where they were last comfortable.
- If you find your dog begins to look worried when you pick up your keys or put on your coat, then you will need to spend some time 'desensitising' your dog to these particular sounds.
 - You can do this by regularly popping your dog in the area during the day as before and get them used to seeing and hearing you pick up your keys, coat or bag.
 - At this point, it's important not to actually leave the house - just allow your dog to get used to these sights and sounds while they are relaxed and comfortable.
- Keep greetings friendly, low-key and predictable on your return, even if you come home to find your dog has chewed something or messed in the house.

Punishment won't help

- It is natural for owners to be angry or disappointed if they return to find damage to their home, mess in the house or annoyed neighbours, but any punishment given on returning home won't help stop the problem.
- Dogs associate punishment with what they are doing at that moment in time and so a dog will not link the telling off with their actions before their owner came home.
- Punishment is not only useless, but it is also likely to make the problem worse. Now, as well as being anxious about being left, a dog will also be worried about the owner returning, which can make any symptoms much, much worse.

