

# Preventing Separation Anxiety



Preventing Separation Anxiety is much easier than resolving it later.

Dogs are social beings, so feeling comfortable alone doesn't always come naturally to them.

Taking time now to help them feel confident will serve you and your dog for a long time to come.



# Predictability Puts Everyone at Ease

Often, dogs are distressed by being left alone due to a lack of understanding about what they are supposed to do while alone, or not being able to predict when or if we will return.

If we establish a predictable routine for leaving home, and give our dogs something to do for the first little while, they quickly learn the pattern and gain confidence.

# Begin by Creating a Safe Space for Being Alone

- This can be a space your dog already loves, or you can create a new one. A great way to determine a good place is to watch where your dog chooses to go after returning from a fun walk or outing.
- Gated is safest until your routine is established, and your dog can safely be left in larger areas. An ex-pen could also be used.
- Avoid crating, if possible. If you feel a crate is necessary, we can work together to find the best way to use it.
- If it's a new space for your dog, hang out IN the space WITH them while they enjoy a chew or licki mat. This will help establish the space as safe and comfortable for them.



# Establish An Alone Time Routine

Once your dog is comfortable in the safe space, you will begin establishing a routine or pattern to make alone time predictable for them.

1. Place several enrichment items in the safe space for your dog. (see last page for ideas)
2. Tell your dog where you are going and when you will be back. Always say "I'll be back".
3. Sit and read just outside the safe space area for a brief period. Do not interact with your dog during this time. This prepares them for you actually being unavailable when you leave home.
4. Make it short enough that your dog will have no reason for concern! We want him to succeed at every step.
5. After the brief period, let your dog out of the space, say hello calmly, and return to your normal activities.



# Gradually Stretch The Time and Distance You are Away



- Slowly Increase the amount of time you are unavailable.
- Begin going out of sight briefly to get something from the kitchen, or take a shower, or out to your car.
- Always give the enrichment items and remember to tell your dog where you are going and when you will be back.
- ALWAYS say “I’ll be back”. This will become the predictable cue your dog needs in order to understand that when you say that, you always return.

\*\*\*If your dog struggles at any stage, back up to the prior step. If he whimpers, cries, or barks for a moment, reassure him, and move on. If it continues, go back a step or three! It is easier to take this in small babysteps to avoid having to go back.

# Do:



- Do make sure your dog has had exercise, and is happy to rest or enjoy a quiet activity for a brief period.
- Do use a camera so that you will know how your dog is doing. Wyze brand cameras are very inexpensive, and easy to set up. You can also use your cell phone for the beginning stages when you won't be leaving your dog for very long.
- Do always choose lengths of time that you feel your dog will be successful, and stretch from there. It is far easier to take this in manageable steps than having to resolve fear after it has developed.
- Do understand that it is very natural for your dog to be apprehensive about being left in the first few months of living in your home. Trust this process to give them the predictable good-bye routine that will ease their concern.

# Don't:



- Do not sneak out without saying “I’ll Be Back”!
- Do not cut off access to you by shutting doors between rooms, etc.
- Do not ignore your dog when you return. (instead, put your things down, get down on his level, and have a calm hello)
- Do not punish him or express disappointment if there is a mess.
- Do not try to confine him in a crate to prevent destructive behavior. This will likely make anxiety worse.



# Enrichment Item Ideas

Pick the things he is most interested in. Keep safety in mind if your dog is prone to ingesting paper, cardboard, fabric, etc. Use the safest chews you can find.

Go for **EASY** to access items. This is **NOT** the time to use puzzles or anything inaccessible or challenging to figure out.

- shallow box full of rags with buried treats
- snuffle mat or shaggy rug with buried treats
- Licki mats or sticky food on a paper plate (cream cheese, applesauce, plain yogurt\_
- stuffed kongs or other enrichment toy
- safe chews such as beef cheek rolls, dried trachea, bully sticks, etc. avoid raw hide.
- small ball pit with treats scattered inside
- rolled towel with scattered treats inside
- recycle surprise bag. save your paper and cardboard recycling. place in a larger box, and scatter treats inside.

# Need Help?

If you need help with this process, please get in touch.

Your dog feeling safe and content in your home alone is peace of mind for you.

It's a simple method, but sometimes it is helpful to have help with the logistics of where to set it up or how fast to progress, depending on your home and your dog.



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