

Separation Anxiety in Dogs
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Recently we have read some articles in local newspapers (NOT this one, by the way) and in other publications that indicate that there is some confusion about separation anxiety – what it is, how it is expressed and how it can be treated. We thought we would address the topic today to help clear up some of the confusion.

- Separation anxiety is a behavior problem characterized by fear, anxiety and distress that occurs when a dog is separated from a person, or another animal to which she has a strong positive relationship or attachment.
- The reasons why some dogs develop the problem and others do not are not known. It is known that dogs from shelters and those that have had multiple homes tend to be more prone to it.
- The most common signs of separation anxiety are excessive barking and howling, destructive behavior, escape from confinement and inappropriate elimination. More rarely, it can be expressed with aggression, anorexia, excessive inactivity or even hyperactivity. Separation anxiety is not the only reasons for these signs and this is why the help of a knowledgeable professional is often necessary to identify the precise cause for the problem behaviors.
- Among some of the other causes for these signs are medical conditions, boredom, fears, play, reactions to exciting or threatening things, reactions to other dogs, break downs in housetraing and scent marking.
- Confining the dog to a crate or some other small area, tying her up, using electronic anti-bark collars, training collars or boundary systems or otherwise punishing the behavior are unlikely to correct separation anxiety problems and may actually make them worse. Worse still, these things may lead to injury to the dog.
- Vigorously exercising the dog, putting the dog with another dog, giving the dog plenty of chew toys or ignoring the dog won't help with separation anxiety problems.
- Separation anxiety is very often treatable. Treatment involves using carefully designed behavior modification techniques and sometimes, the use of medications prescribed by a veterinarian.

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