



Command Dog Training School

INFORMATIONAL FLYER # 4

Separation Anxiety

Some dogs experience separation anxiety when left alone although it can come in many forms. Dogs suffering from separation anxiety may become stressed, nervous and insecure, and as a result may bark, chew, whine, howl, dig, cry, defecate, urinate, salivate, scratch at the door or become hyper-active. It can be a chronic problem, or can be prompted by a house move, shift in schedule, divorce or other lifestyle change. It is a problem that is not specific to any particular breed.

Separation anxiety is frequently triggered by a long period of constant togetherness followed by an abrupt, enforced separation. A typical scenario is a dog acquired by someone during an extended work break. The dog is with the owner, the pack leader, twenty four hours a day, seven days a week and, when the break ends, is suddenly confronted with daily 8– 10 hours absences. Separation anxiety subsequently ensues. Another common display would be the development of separation anxiety following boarding or re-homing. Whether from a shelter or rescue group, dogs re-homed in adolescence or older are at greater risk of suffering separation anxiety than puppies. This is probably because it is more difficult for these dogs to accept changes in their routine and environment. They cling to their new pack leader and panic when that leader leaves home to go out about his or her daily business.

To prevent separation anxiety, dogs need to feel happy, secure, and comfortable when you're not home. Separation anxiety is often a problem of over-bonding. It is not healthy for a dog to follow his caretakers every step, to be constantly in the same room, sharing the same piece of furniture, being in close contact all the time. Promote independence by teaching the dog to drop-stay on his own bed while you go out of sight. Start with a few seconds, then build up to a length of time the dog can tolerate. Put up a gate and eventually close a door between the two of you. Obedience training is a must as it gives direction to the dog in question and minimises confusion between owner & dog. Another option is to place your dog in a dog day-care once or twice a week which can provide further stimulation in the form of canine play and interaction which in many cases, dogs lack.

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