

Working Through Separation Anxiety

First, it is important to know what you are actually dealing with. Is it true separation anxiety? Is it isolation anxiety? Is it boredom behavior? Is it puppy behavior? Etc. "Separation Anxiety" seems to be the diagnosis for many behavior issues. It is important to figure out what your dog is actually dealing with before you can create the most successful training plan.

Below are some tips to work on with your dog that should help with the "separation anxiety" cases that have symptoms similar to boredom/anxious behavior when left alone. To better understand your dog, and to come up with the best training plan for you, please contact Kelsey for more information.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Physical Exercise
- Mental Stimulation
- Crate Training
- Building Confidence

PHYSICAL EXERCISE

Make sure your pup is getting plenty of exercise throughout the day. Often, destructive behavior happens when the dog is full of energy; regular exercise will help drain that pent up energy out of your dog before they take it out on your furniture/shoes/etc. Additionally, dogs that bark or whine when you are away will also benefit from getting more physical activity.

- Exercise your dog BEFORE leaving them alone
- Exercise your dog until they are tired - usually a 10 min lap around the block isn't enough. Exhaustion is not the goal; dogs that are exhausted can feel stressed instead of relaxed.
- Exercise within your dog's limits
 - Dogs (especially puppies and senior dogs) should not be over exercised to avoid straining their muscles and joints
 - Every dog has a different amount of physical energy, so an appropriate exercise routine will vary from one dog to the next

Tired dogs are often good dogs. Exercising the dog before you leave the house is an excellent way to prevent problem behaviors while you are away. Ideally, we want a dog that naps when left alone; having a properly exercised dog is the first step.

MENTAL STIMULATION

Because many separation anxiety type behaviors are related to the dog being bored when left home alone, creating a more mentally stimulating environment will help alleviate the bad behaviors. In addition to physical exercise, challenging your dog mentally (both before you leave and while you are away) is another great way to tire them out.



These materials are provided for you as a way to review behaviors previously discussed in training sessions. It is important for the success of both you and your dog, that these materials are used for reviewing, not for teaching. Do not skip ahead, even if you think your dog is ready. Every dog, every owner, and every situation is specific and requires a training program catered to fit; because these handouts are very general, please talk to Kelsey before attempting any of these training techniques on your own.



- Work on training exercises before you leave
 - Obedience, tricks, impulse control exercises, recall, agility, etc.
- Go on a training walk before leaving to work both body and brain
- Feed your dog with puzzle toys (both before and after you leave)
 - Stuffed Kongs, wobbler toys, slow feeder bowls, frozen treats, etc.
- Play thought provoking games with your dog - remember, games should have rules to follow
 - Find it games, recall games, loose leash games, free shaping games, tug, fetch, etc.

CRATE TRAINING

Creating a safe place for your dog when they are left alone is extremely important. Many dogs will chew, dig, climb, claw, and exhibit many other problem behaviors when you leave the house. Having them in a crate will help ensure their safety as well as the safety of your home! Crate training is not always the right answer for all homes/dogs/families, so a kennel, dog-run, or other safe place may work just as well; however, in most cases, using a crate is the best option.

- Crates = Dens
 - Dogs naturally like having a den so use your crate to create that safe, comfortable sleeping space.
 - The crate should be just big enough for your dog to stand up, turn around, and lay down
 - Having a closed (plastic) crate often creates a more secure feeling for the dog, but covering a wire crate is also a good option. Also, placing the crate in a location that helps the dog feel secure instead of “on display” is ideal.
- Crates eliminate many problem behaviors and keep the dog safe
 - Dogs cannot chew on furniture, eat wires, get into the trash, etc. when they are in the crate
- Make the crate a fun place
 - Feed all the meals in the crate
 - Teach them to go into the crate on cue (make it a fun trick!)
 - Put all toys and bones in the crate
 - Save a special high value bone/toy/treat for crate time only (it goes away when they get let out of the crate)
- Practice often
 - The more frequently the dog enters and exits the crate, the more comfortable they will be. Practice the “crate” cue, give them a goodie, then immediately let them back out.
 - Don't only use the crate when you leave. Practice sleeping in the crate at night, taking naps in the crate during the day, spending calm “chew on the bone” time in the crate whenever you sit down to dinner, etc.

If using a kennel/dog-run/laundry room or any other place as a crate alternative, all the same points apply.



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BUILDING CONFIDENCE

There are many confidence building exercises that can greatly help your pup handle being alone. Any positive training done with your dog builds confidence since they are rewarded for figuring out tasks.

- Make the crate a fun place to go
 - ALWAYS reward for going into the crate
 - Have the dog go into the crate many times every day (even if only for 1 second)
 - Bait the crate with goodies when they are not watching so they can get rewarded randomly for going in
- Teach STAY
 - The stay behavior teaches your dog self-control and confidence while you walk away
 - Add the 3Ds while practicing your stays
 - As your dog gets better, work on going out of sight
 - Always release your dog AFTER you come back so they don't feel the need to come find you
 - Teach Stay in the crate with the door open so they learn how to wait in the crate patiently
 - Have the dog Wait or Stay in the crate before letting them out
 - Only release your dog out of the crate if they are calm
 - Make sure to not excite the dog before you let them out of the crate. They need to earn the opportunity to interact with you by being calm.
- Practice departure behaviors
 - Often the dog associates picking up the car keys or putting on your shoes or other departure behaviors with the action of you leaving the house.
 - Randomly practice departure behaviors without leaving so the dog begins to disassociate the experiences.
 - EX. Pick up your car keys, walk across the house, set them down, go sit on the couch
- Start leaving your dog for short periods
 - If your dog can only remain calm in the crate for 1 second - that's your starting point.
 - Gradually work on leaving your dog in the crate for longer and longer periods of time.
 - Only add a couple of seconds at a time in the beginning
 - Always reward calm behavior by feeding treats while they are still in the crate

Make sure to never correct or punish your dog for any anxious behavior. If a dog is acting out because they are anxious, punishing them will create an even higher level of anxiety. Additionally, do not acknowledge attention seeking behavior. If a dog is exhibiting bad behaviors to get your attention, any form of acknowledgement (even negative attention) will still encourage the behavior.

Please contact Kelsey with any questions, comments, or concerns!! Congratulations on helping your pup become Pawsitively Trained!

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