

## Separation Anxiety

Many dogs experience separation anxiety when left alone. They will often whine, bark, cry, howl, chew, dig, scratch at the door, soil the house or destroy your home and yard. I once had a Spaniel that ate his way through my hallway drywall to get into the living room. We often unintentionally train our dogs to behave this way because whenever they throw this kind of tantrum when we leave, we quickly come back to reassure them, give them attention or even a bone or biscuit. If you do this, Puppy will soon learn that he/she can control you with emotional blackmail.

Long, drawn-out farewells can create separation anxiety problems by first exciting Puppy and then making the isolation more obvious when you're gone. Just when Puppy gets all worked up and ready to play, suddenly you disappear. With all this energy, Puppy will either try his/her best to get you to come back or vent this energy in some other way. Since Puppy can't build model airplanes or invite buddies over for card games, he/she does doggy things - like chew, dig and bark.

Some think there is no such thing as separation anxiety. They believe that Puppy may be relieved to be able to do those things he/she normally can't do when you're home. Puppy may be thinking, "Thank goodness the owner is finally leaving! Now I can chase the cat, dig up the tomatoes, get in the trash, and bark at the neighbors. They never let me do those things when they're home." However; I have never seen one of my dogs start eating the drywall while I was home.

Some dogs with separation anxiety are stressed, nervous and insecure when they are left alone. They believe you are *never* coming back. They express this anxiety in typical dog fashion - chewing, digging, barking and house soiling.

To prevent separation anxiety, Puppy needs to feel happy, secure, and comfortable when you're away. It's important to give him/her things to do while you're gone. Provide Puppy with lots of toys. Often another companion pet can help alleviate the boredom.

Another way to prevent separation anxiety is to set aside scheduled time periods to give Puppy undivided attention, play and exercise. A happy, well-exercised Puppy will usually sleep contentedly during the day while you are gone. Be sure that one of the scheduled play sessions occurs before you must leave for the day. Give Puppy a chance to settle down before you leave and don't make a big deal of your departure - just leave without any commotion.

If Puppy is already experiencing separation anxiety, then gradually accustom him/her to your leaving. Practice leaving and returning several times a day. Puppy will get used to your departures and realizes that you are not abandoning him/her forever. I have started this with all the Puppies in their development. I removed the mother from them at night during week 5. They are on a strict play/eat/sleep schedule. As the Puppies have grown older, their play time has been extended from 5PM onwards until they are tired and ready for sleep. Your biggest problem will be to help Puppy overcome the "Alone" feeling he/she now has.

Gradually leave for longer and longer periods of time, but start out by leaving for just 5 minutes and returning again.