

TREATMENT OF SEPARATION ANXIETY - What DOES Work

1. Take the dog for a fast walk on a leash at least once a day. It should be 15 - 30 minutes long. Even if your dog has a large yard to run in all day, the fast walking will be beneficial.
2. Obedience train for 10 minutes twice daily. Train control and quiescence by teaching come, sit, stay and down-stay. The goal is to achieve a 20 minute down-stay. Train for food rewards at the beginning, but later vary food, touch and voice praise. Give the dog a reward every time he performs when you are first teaching a command, but as he gets better at it, reward the behavior intermittently. This makes the response less easily forgotten.
3. Give the dog an acceptable item to chew, *only* when you go out. We find that a hard nylon bone is very useful. Drill a number of small holes in it, and stuff the holes with cheese. The cheese helps train attachment to the bone. Give the bone to the dog about 15 minutes before you go out, and *before* you give the dog any cues that you are about to leave.
4. Everyone in the family should *totally ignore the dog* for 15-20 minutes before leaving the house (after you give the dog his bone) and for at least 20 minutes on returning home. This helps to reduce the dog's excitement level before you leave, which reduces the tension he feels when you are gone.
5. In addition to the above training, the person the dog is most attached to should *totally ignore the dog* for a minimum of 3 weeks (possibly longer, we'll decide on that over the phone). This is the most important part of the treatment, because it is what reduces the dog's dependence on you. Ignoring means not allowing the dog to follow you around, and not looking at, talking to or touching the dog. Just pretend that the dog doesn't exist! I know how difficult this is (you got a dog in the first place to enjoy its company) but it is absolutely essential that you do it. Keep in mind that it is for a short time relative to the dog's life, and that if you do this conscientiously, it will work quickly and effectively to solve your problem. Be assured that you will be able to relate to your dog in a more normal way once the dog's dependence on you has been reduced.
6. Make a list of the things that you do before you go out for the day (and the destruction occurs), and the things you do before you go out for a short time (and no destruction occurs). Then, mix up the cues. For example, if the dog is fine when you go downstairs to do the laundry, try taking the laundry basket with you when you go out to work.
7. Drugs may be used in association with retraining, but they do not cure the problem. In fact, the use of medication reduces your dog's ability to learn. Using drugs in conjunction with retraining may be necessary, but it will also prolong the treatment.
8. If the above techniques do not work, we will try Planned Departure training in conjunction with the above program. However, this is quite time consuming, and requires even more commitment from you than the above. Please get in touch with us and we will send you more information and help you through the training.

The above techniques have worked well in the past, but they require a commitment from you if they are to be effective. Although we cannot retrain your dog, we are here to help you in whatever way we can, so please call (519) 823-8800, extension 4041, if you have any problems or questions. If you have a touch tone phone, you can avoid the university operator by calling 824-4747 and entering extension 4041 at the appropriate time. Once you start the training, please call every 2 weeks to let us know how you are getting along. Working together, I am sure that we will be able to eliminate this unwanted behavior and that you and your dog will have many more, problem-free years together.