

Preventing Separation Anxiety in Dogs

Congratulations on adopting your new dog. As you know, dogs are social animals and some have a hard time being alone. Dogs who are anxious when alone can sometimes bark all day, chew things, or eliminate in the house despite being housetrained. The following suggestions can help prevent separation anxiety or improve mild cases of the disorder.

1. Aerobic exercise before you leave your dog home alone is a great idea. Exercise allows the dog to get rid of excess energy and the endorphin release they get when exercising helps them to stay calm afterwards. Take your dog for a brisk walk, jog or toss the ball in the yard for at least 15-20 minutes before you head out. As they say - a tired dog is a good dog.
2. Keep your departures and your arrivals very low key. If you make a big deal right before you leave and right when you come home you put a huge disparity between when you are home and when you are not.
3. When you leave your dog alone, make sure to leave the radio on for some company. A station that plays soft soothing music is best but a news stations works well for company too. Try to avoid leaving the TV on because the flickering lights can over-stimulate the dog.
4. It's also helpful to leave your dog with a special treat whenever you leave to pair something good with your departure. I suggest leaving a Kong or hollow marrowbone stuffed with some kind of food paste (peanut butter, liverwurst, wet dog food, etc.) that will keep him busy for a while after you leave. You should also hide some treats around the house for your dog to search for in your absence.

These practices can help relieve any anxiety your dog has about being left alone. If your dog is experiencing the more severe symptoms of separation anxiety you will need to work through a more detailed and thorough program to address it. Your dog may also benefit from anti-anxiety medication from your vet if the anxiety is severe.