

Preventing Separation Anxiety

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A dog with separation anxiety shows distress when separated from family members. We don't know exactly what causes separation anxiety; some dogs may be genetically predisposed, or it may be a learned behavior or a combination of both.

Tips to help prevent separation anxiety

- Meet your dog's physical, social, and exploratory needs each day through routine, scheduled activities such as play, positive reinforcement training, leashed walks, & environmental enrichment.
 - See our DIY Dog Enrichment videos on fearfreehappyhomes.com for some ideas.
- Teach your dog independence and to be comfortable being left alone or separated from you by a baby gate or door.
- If you are home with your dog for most of the day, make sure you ignore him sometimes and do not make a constant fuss over him. Constant attention when you are home makes it harder for him when you leave.
- Schedule alone time for your dog each day while you go for a walk, pick up groceries, take a short drive, or take a shower.
- Offer your dog a food puzzle toy when you leave to give him something fun to do. Use caution in multiple pet households as some dogs will fight over a food toy.
- Use calming dog pheromones (such as Adaptil) sprayed onto bedding or in a plug-in diffuser and play calming music such as classical or species-specific music at times throughout the day and when you leave the home.
- Catch your dog being calm and when the dog is ignoring you, reward him with calm and pleasant attention.
- Make your arrivals and departures calm and no big deal. Do not make a big fuss over your dog or be overly emotional when you leave the house or when you first arrive home.

If you suspect your dog already has separation anxiety

- Clinical signs often fall into one or all of three categories: excessive vocalization, destructive chewing/scratching, or inappropriate elimination.
- Have your dog evaluated by your veterinarian ASAP. Your veterinarian will ask about the history of the behavior and may perform diagnostic tests before making a behavioral diagnosis.
- Video your dog as you prepare to depart from the home and when left home alone or separated from you. This can help your veterinarian.
- For more on how to identify and alleviate separation anxiety, watch our video series on Canine Separation Anxiety on fearfreehappyhomes.com.

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