



# Greater Androscoggin Humane Society

[www.SavingPetsinMaine.org](http://www.SavingPetsinMaine.org)

## Separation Anxiety in Dogs

### What does separation anxiety stem from?

- 1) The animal previously suffered from anxiety and now the dog has not been alone during this time.
- 2) Usually someone has been there in the past and the dog has never had to opportunity to be alone.
- 3) Dogs who have been re-homed multiple times have a tendency to have anxiety and existing confidence issues.
- 4) Some dogs have a hard time with a change in routine. A common fact for dogs is that usually if they suffer from separation anxiety they also may have anxiety with other things in their life. (thunder, crate, car, fear of people, etc.)

### How can I help my dog?

First you must rule out why the dog is barking. Is it because he is enjoying it or is it truly stress-related? Is the dog destructive because he is stressed or is he having fun doing so? Refer to body language handout attached in email. Separation anxiety usually lasts for about 20 minutes after the owner departs contrary to what is commonly thought.

Some dogs will chew/scratch doors, objects, because they have made that association of them with you. To fully work with them we have to understand the dynamic of your home. Does your dog view you as a leader? Is your dog confident? Does your dog have a higher pack drive where they need to be around others more so than other independent dogs? Some dogs are already born with this drive and do better with another dog. When you are home, do you allow your dog to follow you around the home constantly or do you encourage them to do things independently?

In order to combat separation anxiety, we need to help our dogs not react to what we are doing. If we are getting our shoes on to leave and the dog's emotional response changes, we need to control the situation and not allow them to exhibit that behavior by coddling, etc. Blocking them from rushing towards the door when they realize that you are getting ready to leave with your body and redirecting them helps guide them a lot. Yelling or getting frustrated does not work and heightens anxiety. It is important to be proactive. It is easier on the dog to lessen how much preparation by having everything ready before you leave. Sometimes the dog watching you grab all of your items to leave builds anxiety and fear so encouraging



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independence by having him in another room while you prepare would help.

Having your dog go to another room, or a crate, can be an effective tool when you are getting ready to leave the house. The key is to always remain calm and that includes baby talk etc. and to check to see how your dog's energy level is each day before you leave. If a dog isn't calm due to energy, anxiety, etc. we must work to bring his energy level down before crating. We must always reward calm behavior and ignore the negative behavior. Dogs are den animals and like enclosed spaces. Some dogs will go under tables, couches, under covers, under your desk, or even hide under something when fearful. They may even consider laying in-between their owners on the couch a den-like place. A crate is never used for a time-out. It should always be a positive experience for them. Sometimes it is easier to have both a wire and a plastic crate as a plastic crate is more mobile. Depending on the size of the dog, an x-pen would also be a great option.

Start leaving your dog for 20 seconds either by going to the mailbox or outside and then switch it up to 1 minute, then 20 seconds, and increase it to 3 minutes and so on. Vary times you are gone gradually. If there seems to be some stressors, depending on the degree, there are also many different natural or pharmaceutical options available and at times your veterinarian can easily recommend them over the phone. You could try Thundershirts, pheromones, and other things out on the market that have shown great success rates.

Leave the house without your dog; even taking a walk around the block alone can be helpful. Time home alone will give you a chance to test how they will do with some independence and allow them to build confidence in being home alone. A camera is helpful to watch his behavior if available as well as being able to show your veterinarian/behaviorist for suggestions. Leave treats in toys, use a kong/bone frozen, etc. with the list provided. Before leaving, pull the object out and present it to the dog but leave it out on the counter for 10-15 minutes so he can see and smell it to get him excited about the object each time you leave. Before leaving, have the dog offer a behavior and set it on the ground, in-kennel, etc.

You may find this crate game helpful. One crate is for inclusion and one is for a quiet, alone-time crate. Pick a consistent cue so they make the association of that word with the crate. Food and toy rewards should always be used when crate training. Never release your dog from his crate when barking or whining. Start to crate your dog a half hour before you leave if your dog is already used to crating up. Be enthusiastic about the dog entering the crate but calm and neutral when releasing them. All high value treats, toys, should initially be given in-crate. Pick a high value item like a frozen filled kong or filled bone that is only given in-crate.

Please remember, for dogs with pre-existing negative associations with crating, you must change the emotional response to the crate.