

Prevention and Treatment of Mild Separation Anxiety

Notes from seminar presented by Debbie Winkler CABC (Certified Animal Behavioral Consultant), CPDT-KA (Certified Professional Dog Trainer-Knowledge Assessed), SATS (Syn Alia Training System Certified)

General Information:

1. Dogs are pack animals and were not meant to live alone, but are capable of learning to tolerate living alone.
2. It is always best to have more than one dog, and cats and other animals do not replace a second dog. The reason for this is:
 - Companionship
 - Play/exercise
 - No isolation in the owners absence
3. Our long time conventional wisdom about adopting dogs to people who are home all the time, or taking time off to be with the new dog initially, or providing a person to be with the dog constantly for the first few weeks is actually harmful to the dogs in the long run and often contributes to the development of Separation Anxiety (SA). I realize this may be difficult for many of us to accept.
4. Owners/Adopters actually need to begin teaching a dog to accept being alone the moment the dog/puppy enters the home.
 - Additionally owners/adopters should immediately introduce the dog to their new environment and all the novel stimulus there. Don't assume the dog has experienced these. Also, dogs don't generalize like we do, so the dishwasher or hair dryer in the foster home is different from the one in the new home from the dog's perspective.
 - dishwasher
 - hair dryer
 - vacuum cleaner
 - anything you can think of that might be novel or strange
5. When the dog is brought home, the family needs to leave returning five min. later. This needs to occur at least 10X in the first four hours.
6. Each day family should leave at least 3X a day for a week even on days off or weekends.
7. Leave at different times of the day, and leave and return through different entrances and exits. The idea is not to create a pattern of leaving and returning that the dog can predict.

8. Leave the dog in the largest area possible. At the very least a 4x4 X-pen if the dog needs to be confined.
9. Every other time leave a stuffed Kong. Stuff with a portion of the dogs regular meal, not additional treats. Kongs can be prepared ahead of time by mixing dry kibble with wet food.
10. When the family returns do not always go immediately to the dog. Wait a few moments at least every other return.
11. No good-bye or hello scenes, just leave and return without any fanfare.
12. The more excited a dog is when an owner returns, the more stress the dog has experienced in their absence.
13. Dogs generally take a month to adapt to a new environment. During this time be respectful of the dogs need to adjust. Many dogs need time to adjust to the family and environment, so they may not immediately be comfortable with snuggling, kissing, holding and all those wonderful things we immediately want to do with a new dog to show them that they are loved. Give them space and let them dictate what they are comfortable with and when. Too often in our desire to let a new dog know they are safe and loved we overwhelm them. Think about how you might feel if you were entering a new situation with new people and they all insisted on running up and hugging and kissing you profusely, yet we think this is totally appropriate with dogs.

****Note:**

- Many dogs with a history of SA will not exhibit it in a new home if the above procedure is followed immediately.
- Dogs with multiple placements are more prone to SA. Each change creates anxiety for the dog similar to people who experience multiple stressors or traumas and become depressed or anxious.

Signs of Separation Anxiety:

When the owner leaves the dog:

- Barks, howls or whines
- Circles and paces
- Scratches at door and windows
- Leaps through doors or windows
- Attempts to escape confinement, may break teeth or injure themselves
- Salivates
- Urinates/defecates
- Digs through walls
- Self mutilates

- Destroys furniture or owner possessions

Assessment and Intervention:

1. Get a detailed history.

- Get in-depth information regarding the dog's past as well as the present relationship with the owner.
- Are there predictors in the owner's behavior that tell the dog they are leaving? These can sometimes be very subtle like one last check in the hall mirror.
- Can the dog tolerate any level of separation from the owner like showering, taking the trash out, in the garden etc.?
- Does the owner indulge the dog with constant attention, toys all over the home, several beds, coats, collars (not bad in and of themselves, but can indicate and over indulgent owner?)
- Is the owner always petting or holding the dog?
- Is there only one person in the home?
- Are there other pets?
- Does the owner immediately correct the dog for something when returning home?
- Is there something going on in or outside the home in the owners absence that is scaring the dog i.e. neighbors having noisy construction on their property?
- If the dog is confined, is the confinement suitable for the dog?
 - Is water available? Providing water WILL NOT encourage urination in confinement. Many dogs suffer in crates with no water all day.
 - Is the confinement large enough? A regular sized crate is not adequate for a medium size dog like and Eskie. A 4X4X5 kennel can be purchased for as little as \$199.00, or you can purchase a top for a 4X4 Xpen that will stabilize it so that a dog cannot tip it. If in a carpeted area, you can get a remnant of linoleum from your home store very cheaply to place under the pen.
 - Is there stimulation? Pre-prepare Kongs with the dog's meals and freeze them to use. Provide food puzzle toys with a portion of the dog's meal. Use stuffed raw marrow bones.

2. Define the symptoms, what is the dog doing while alone?

3. Address the relationship with the family. Dogs are often confused about their role. Remember that if the dog thinks they are running the show that is a heavy burden especially for an anxious dog.

- Explain the parent role.
 - Owner/family need to run the show, not the dog.

- The dog does not get to make the rules.
- Take the burden off the dog to be in charge.
- Introduce the Nothing In Life Is Free (NILIF) program. There is great info on the internet about this humane program, or if you contact Gale at glhaugh@gmail.com I can email info to you.
 - Immediately teach the dog three behaviors like 'sit' 'down' and 'shake.'
 - Always ask the dog for one of the three (alternate so they don't pattern train or anticipate) before they get ANYTHING (food, attention, going out, walk, NOTHING IN LIFE IS FREE)
- The dog needs to follow direction.
- Does the dog get adequate exercise with appropriate equipment?
 - No choke or prong collars.
 - Use front pull harness like the sensation harness.
 - No electric fences. These are horrible for anxious dogs. They are trapped in, but others are not trapped out.
 - Dogs are hunters and foragers. Provide stuffed Kongs or food dispensing puzzles or toys. Feed the dog with these.

4. Video or audio record the dog when the owner leaves. The majority of SA behavior will occur within the first 30 min. of the owner leaving.

Separation Anxiety Program:

1. A behavior CAN NOT be modified while it is occurring.
2. If the owner works, have them arrange for doggy daycare or boarding at a kennel or vet. hospital during the modification process when they are at work or away for long periods of time during the day.
3. The owner can only work the program when they are at home i.e. evenings and weekends.
4. Confining the dog in a crate or pen from which they can not escape will only worsen the problem.
5. Always begin with the owner being separated from the dog while in the home.
6. Using a baby gate or divider the owner gives a stuffed Kong while they are on the other side doing anything but looking at or paying attention to the dog.
7. Begin with five min. intervals of being separated.
8. When the dog is comfortable being separated from the owner/family for progressively longer periods of time in the home it is time to begin working on the owner leaving.
9. For three days leave for 3-5 min. 30X always providing a stuffed Kong and removing it when you return.

10. For three more days, repeat, but reduce the repetitions to 15 and increase the time to 10-15 min.

11. Gradually continue to increase the time while lessening the repetitions. Work up to leaving for four hours at a time. Do this GRADUALLY. If you move to fast you will undo all your work to date.

12. Remove any signals that might allow the dog to anticipate you leaving.

- Unexpectedly leave via one door and return by another.
- Take your car keys with you to various locations in the house when you do not intend to leave.
- Put your coat on at various times when you do not intend to leave, watch tv or eat dinner.
- Take your purse, briefcase, or anything you normally take with you when you leave to various locations in the house when you do not intend to leave.
- Start your car and let it run, but don't go anywhere.
- Raise and lower your garage door at random times.
- Randomize any behaviors you do when you leave the house, but don't leave.

13. Keep records and note progress if there is regression back up a step or two for a while.

14. When the dog can be alone with no incidents for an hour, try a couple of 1/2 days.

15. Often the dog is far less anxious by this time, but it is recommended that a walk to break up the day is helpful either coming home for a bit or hiring a dog walker.

Medication:

Some extreme cases of SA may require medication.

- Many vets are not well versed in the use of psychotropic medications and will prescribe what the drug manufactures tell them is good.
- Veterinary behaviorist have set up a hot line available for veterinarians to call for advice. If your vet office does not have a veterinary behaviorist on staff and most don't encourage them to call the hot line to discuss the dog's symptoms and what medication would be best.
- Medication is not a permanent fix.
- Statistically Prozac has proven most effective; in really extreme cases BuSpar may be added. The Prozac is an SSRI increasing Serotonin receptors in the brain allowing more to be absorbed. BuSpar is an anti-anxiety medication with a mild sedating effect. Neither of these medications are intended as the sole treatment and must be combined with behavior modification. You may need to work with your vet to get an effective dosage as every dog is different. Once behavior modification is producing marked results the dog must be weaned off

the medication very gradually. The length of time this takes will depend on the length of time the dog has been on the medication.

Things to Remember.

- Always make sure the dog is physically comfortable with space, water and enrichment when left alone.
- Those of us in rescue are more knowledgeable and tolerant than the average adopter; don't hesitate to provide adopters with instructions for transitioning a new dog or pup to their home.
- Always give new dogs time, and space to adjust, don't assume the new dog want to immediately snuggle and hug.
- Every dog is different, and like people come with various levels of flexibility to their personalities. Some highly flexible dogs can overcome huge adversity. Dogs with less flexible personalities will have greater difficulty adjusting to changes or trauma.
- Love isn't enough. Sometimes we have to show our love by implementing behavioral change that will allow the dog to function more independently and with greater self confidence, and this sometimes seems counter intuitive to what we feel we should do.
- Like children dogs do not do a good job being in charge when living in a family.

If anyone has questions don't hesitate to email me at glhaugh@gmail.com. If I can't answer it I will contact Debbie.

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