



Companion Animal Behavioural Services Creating Contentment From Knowledge And Kindness

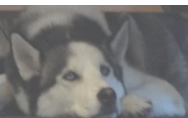
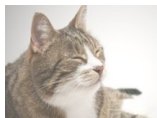
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SEPARATION DISORDER



It is natural for dogs to feel concerned when they are first left alone. Dogs - and humans - are social animals; living in groups provides protection from danger, help with obtaining food - and company. 70%-80% of the estimated 900 million dogs worldwide are feral and live in loose groupings with varying degrees of interaction with people.

Living in a home is therefore unusual for dogs and they need help with fitting in with our busy lifestyles so that they become a pleasure not a bind.



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Dogs need to be habituated gradually to being left alone as soon as they have settled in. This applies both to puppies leaving their breeder for the first time and to older dogs who have come into a new home. Most dogs can learn to cope with being alone for short periods but they should not be left for hours on a regular basis.

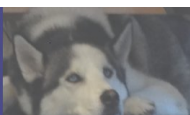
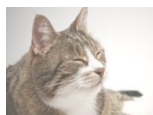
Identifying Separation Disorder

Most dogs can become restless and/or vocalise a little when they are first left alone but true separation disorder is more serious. Suffering dogs may show the following signs:

- Extreme and continuous vocalisation
- Inappropriate elimination
- Vomiting
- Drooling
- Digging - especially around windows and doors
- Self-harm
- Repetitive behaviours
- Signs of anxiety before being left
- Refusal to engage with food or toys when alone.

Finding A Solution

Some dogs have a genetic pre-disposition to lack resilience. This tends to be more common in smaller dogs that have been bred for generations to be companion dogs. Many street dogs have been imported to live as companion animals and, even when they are brought in as puppies, are often not genetically (or epigenetically) well prepared for living in a home.



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It is commonly assumed that dogs that suffer from separation disorder are overly attached to their owner but in fact, research has shown that this is not the case. It is usually dogs that find it difficult to form an attachment to a human that are most at risk. All animals need to be able to feel secure and safe. Social animals such as dogs and humans will either bond to another member of their species or another species to satisfy that need.

Working to help a dog with separation disorder is therefore not as simple as habituating him to being alone. It is essential to work on the human-animal bond as well as to desensitise him to being left. Dogs may identify many signs that they are about to be left which is why they can be triggered long before you are actually ready to leave home.

This can be a long and slow process. It is essential to proceed at a pace that the dog can manage and not place him in a situation that sets off the problem behaviours. It may take time to identify and work on each trigger and the problem will need managing in the interim. It may be necessary to find a trusted person to sit with a dog so that he is never alone and you may need to remove furnishings or otherwise protect your home in case there is an incident.

It may be necessary to work in conjunction with your vet to provide anti-anxiety medication especially if there are outdoor stimuli that also trigger anxiety. medication should always be combined with a behavioural programme because unwanted behaviours will not be eliminated with medication alone.

It is rarely an easy process but, if carried out slowly and carefully, dogs have the potential to make a full recovery. Even where this isn't possible, it is usually the case that the situation can be improved.

Contact Companion Animal Behavioural Services at
info@dogsnet.org for more help

