

Brain & Cognitive Disorders

How to Cope with Puppy Separation Anxiety



If your puppy scratches at the door, cries or barks excessively, eliminates in the house and/or is destructive every time your family leaves the house, your puppy may be suffering from separation anxiety. Why some puppies develop separation anxiety and some do not is not fully understood. Whatever the cause, it is important to realize these behaviors are not malicious but are signs of anxiety. Punishing your puppy will not eliminate separation anxiety. Gradually adjusting your puppy to being alone is the best approach.

Preventing Separation Anxiety

It is good for your puppy to be comfortable when home alone. You can help your puppy learn this by taking a little time and following these simple steps. Start as soon as your puppy comes home, if possible.

1. Develop a schedule for your puppy.

Ensure your family follows the schedule. Puppies like routine.

2. Crate train your puppy.

The use of a crate is a great way to help your puppy remain calm while home alone.

Your puppy should initially remain in the crate for short periods while you are present. Give your puppy a treat or an appropriate toy so that the crate is associated with something positive. Gradually increase the time crated. Reward quiet behavior with calm praise.

Thereafter, start leaving your puppy alone in the crate. Start with just a few minutes at a time. Gradually increase the time spent alone. Always give your puppy an opportunity to eliminate prior to crating.

Most puppies do not need to be crated throughout their lives, but do not rush the process. Some puppies are not ready to be left outside of the crate unsupervised in the home until they are approximately a year-and-a-half or older.

3. Make leaving and arriving home uneventful.

Limit the attention your puppy receives shortly before leaving, to encourage calm behavior. While you are away, music or sound from a television may help provide your puppy with engagement and distraction.

When you arrive home, let your puppy out of the crate quietly. Do not act overly excited.

4. Try to make sure someone in your family is home as much as possible.

One rule of thumb is to limit your puppy's time in the crate to not more than one hour per month of age. Consider hiring a puppy-walker or neighbor to give your puppy a midday break while everyone is at work or school.

5. Talk to your veterinarian.

Your veterinarian is the best person to talk to when it comes to your puppy's separation anxiety. Your veterinarian may recommend a supplement that can support calm behavior, such as a probiotic containing the proprietary strain *Bifidobacterium longum* NCC3001 (BL999), alpha-casozepine (derived from milk), or L-theanine (from tea). A Purina study showed that anxious dogs supplemented with the strain of *Bifidobacterium longum* showed a reduction in anxious behaviors.

A vest, shirt or wrap that applies light, constant compression may be helpful in some pets (similar to calming a baby with swaddling). If your puppy's signs are severe, your veterinarian may recommend a behavior specialist and/or medications.

Following these tips can help ease your puppy's separation anxiety and make your pet feel more comfortable being home alone.

The Purina Institute aims to help put nutrition at the forefront of pet health discussions by providing user-friendly, science-based information that helps pets live longer, healthier lives.