

# How to Help a Dog With Separation Anxiety

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It's a heartbreaking scene; after a short time away from your house, you return to a dog that's wet from drool, trembling, and wide-eyed with fear. There's a mess by the door, and the TV remote and couch cushions are chewed to bits.

It's clear that you're dealing with more than just typical canine mischief. This is a case of a dog with separation anxiety, which can cause extreme stress for your pup and for you.

Here's how to help your dog with separation anxiety to ensure their safety and well-being.

[Separation anxiety](#) is a stress response that a dog exhibits when they are away from the person (or people) that they are bonded to.

[Tina Flores](#), KPA-CTP, CSAT, certified separation anxiety trainer (CSAT) explains, "When a dog is experiencing separation anxiety, it is quite similar to a panic attack in a human. A human, for example, with a fear of heights who is placed on top of a tall building might exhibit sweaty palms, dry mouth and fast heart rate. In the same way, every time a dog who has separation anxiety is left alone, their bodies are flooded with the same stress hormones."

The dog's reactions can range from mild distress, like pacing and whining, to extreme anxiety, resulting in dogs that injure themselves when attempting to escape confinement and find "their" people.

While there is no single reason why some dogs develop this challenging response to being left alone, for some dogs, it's related to a traumatic event or an environmental change that they found upsetting. Examples include:

- Changes in the family dynamic (death of a family member or divorce)
- Changes in lifestyle (rehoming or moving from the country to the city)
- Changes in routine (pet owner transitioning from a part-time to a full-time position)

However, it's also possible for a dog that hasn't had any trauma in their past to develop separation anxiety, perhaps due to an underlying genetic predisposition to the condition.

## Does My Dog Have Separation Anxiety?

Many of the behaviors that are attributed to separation anxiety can have alternate diagnoses that are medical or behavioral.

For example, excessive drooling might be caused by a fractured tooth or nausea, barking could be a response to a territorial threat, and accidents might mean that the dog isn't fully house-trained or has a urinary tract infection.

In order to determine how to treat separation anxiety in dogs, pet parents should first schedule a veterinary exam to rule out illness or other behavioral reasons for the responses.

## Signs of Separation Anxiety in Dogs

Dogs suffering from separation anxiety often learn their person's predeparture cues—like putting on a certain uniform, making lunch or organizing a briefcase—and begin to exhibit stress responses before their person even leaves.

Once the dog is alone, they might exhibit any (or all) of the following hallmarks of separation anxiety:

- **Pacing:** Dogs that are panicked by their person's departure might be unable to settle down and might resort to walking back and forth repeatedly.
- **Vocalization:** [Barking and howling](#) are common canine responses to isolation, but dogs with separation anxiety might continue vocalizing the entire time they're alone.
- **Loss of appetite:** Separation anxiety can cause even the most food-motivated dog to ignore treats and bones.
- **Destruction:** Many dogs suffering from separation anxiety destroy small household items—like the remote control or pillows—or resort to large-scale destruction, like tearing through furniture, walls, doors or windows.
- **Elimination:** Dogs that are house-trained might have accidents while alone, including diarrhea.
- **Drooling:** Some stressed [dogs drool excessively](#) and wind up with a soaked chin and chest.
- **Escape:** Dogs with severe separation anxiety might be able to escape confinement, which can result in injuries.

## How to Help a Dog With Separation Anxiety

The goal in treating separation anxiety in dogs is twofold: to help your dog feel less reliant on you, and to encourage your dog's ability to relax when you are away from home.

Helping a dog get past separation anxiety takes time and patience—unfortunately, there's no such thing as a quick fix for stress-based behaviors.

Because treating separation anxiety is a complex process, pet parents should look for a trainer or behaviorist with a background in treating the behavior, like a certified separation anxiety trainer (CSAT) or a veterinary behaviorist that can dispense medication if the case calls for it.

### Behavior Modification

The best way to help your dog deal with separation anxiety is to permanently change his perception of what being alone means, one second at a time. A dog trainer or a veterinary behaviorist will be your best resource in creating a behavior modification program that suits your dog's needs.