

## My Dog seems anxious. Does he suffer from separation distress?

### Answer from CLEAR Dog Training

Separation distress occurs in dogs that have not been taught how to enjoy being alone in their own company. These dogs often show their distress before the owner leaves through either excitement or depression. However, the most important signs of anxiety usually occur within half an hour of the owner's departure. These signs include:

- ☹️ Aggression when the owner leaves - growling or nipping at ankles.
- ☹️ Vocalisation: barking, whining, howling.
- ☹️ Destructive behaviour - chewing, digging, and tearing up furniture.
- ☹️ Self-mutilation - excessive licking, hyperactivity, constant pacing.
- ☹️ Urination or defecation in the house.
- ☹️ Diarrhoea, vomiting or constipation.
- ☹️ Escaping.

The severity of these behaviours, which and how many of them may occur, varies widely among breeds and individuals.



Some people advocate trying to suppress undesirable behaviours caused by separation anxiety, especially excessive barking, via punishment and negative reinforcement methods. Quick fix techniques can actually **increase** anxiety, as they do not go to the underlying cause of the problem. Side effects of punishment are that the relationship between the owner and their dog suffers and usually other problems soon surface.

For a veterinary behaviourist or behavioural trainer familiar with separation anxiety, it is relatively clear in these cases what is going on. If the owner is willing to devote time and work with the animal, the chances for a successful resolution are good. Leadership programmes, positive reinforcement for good behaviour, desensitisation and counter-conditioning are so effective that the problem is usually solvable without turning, as a last resort, to calming drugs.

Each dog is unique and these issues are discussed appropriately at a first assessment. If the problem is complex and beyond our level of expertise &/or might also require medication, then we will unhesitatingly refer to a veterinary behaviourist - being a vet who has then spent years of further study to gain an additional university degree in animal behaviour.