

Separation anxiety as a result of the pandemic. What can you do?

Advice written by Rosie Bescoby, Clinical Animal Behaviourist in combination with ADAPTIL®.



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Pet Sense

What has happened?

The pandemic has really changed up our lives. A lot more time has been spent at home and our daily routines have been altered. Also, due to this life change, it has allowed many homes the chance to welcome a dog into their family due to being around more.

Lockdowns have been a very positive experience for many of our dogs as they are social animals and love to be with us! But with life about to change back to 'normal' our dogs are going to have to re-adjust again. Some of us have never even left our dog home alone yet so it's going to be a brand new experience.

This leaflet will discuss how you can tackle separation anxiety. All the advice contained it written by Rosie Bescoby, a clinical animal behaviourist. However if you continue to be concerned we would recommend seeking further advice from your vet or a qualified behaviourist, see apbc.org.uk for your local one.



Separation Anxiety

Separation anxiety in dogs has many underlying causes.

You may have noticed that your dog is no longer as relaxed as they used to be when you leave the house, you may have had a neighbour inform you that when you leave your dog is barking a lot, or you have started to come home to destruction. Some signs can be much more subtle.



Symptoms that a dog is struggling when left alone include:

- Barking or howling
- Destructive behaviour e.g. chewing
- Toileting in the house
- Pacing
- Not settling
- Drooling or panting

TIP: If you are not sure what your dog is up to when they are home alone, purchase a camera to have a look.

How do I know if it's Separation Anxiety?

It can be common to assume that your dog has Separation Anxiety when in fact your dog is bored and under-stimulated, not fully toilet trained, barking because of activity outside the house or a whole host of other reasons.



If your dog is **ONLY** exhibiting undesirable behaviour when left alone, it's firstly important to realise that your dog is not giving you a hard time – they are having a hard time. It can be tempting to try to prevent expression of the unwanted behaviour by locking your dog in a crate or using a bark-activated collar that emits something the dog finds unpleasant, but it is really important for your dog's welfare not to attempt to address the behaviour in this way. This is because it is not dealing with *why* your dog is struggling, and in fact will cause your dog to find being left home alone even more unpleasant. Because your dog now can't manage using its normal coping strategies, it can cause the anxiety to be expressed in different ways (and often more extreme ways) such as self-mutilation.



How to tackle it?

We want to prevent the dog from being in a situation where it can't cope – initially that might mean rallying help from friends, neighbours, family and dog sitters to care for your dog. You want to work on gradually re-introducing very short periods of separation so that your dog remains relaxed the whole time.

Initially this might mean working on your dog staying settled whilst you are in the same room as them, and then when separated from you while you are still in the house.

You can start off by providing your dog with lots of self-reinforcing activities when you are home that encourage independence, so that they start to find enjoyment in doing things by themselves. If you can build some separation in the house with your dog remaining relaxed, then that is a great first step.

DOGS

Training tips to help your dog with separation anxiety



Go at your dog's pace – The best success is seen by doing things slowly. It needs to start with whatever the dog can cope with. This might be as little as stepping the other side of a door and immediately returning, and then gradually building up to longer periods. It is important that they remain relaxed throughout – do not move onto a longer period until you have had complete success with the activity you are on.



Begin while you are around – Get your dog used to being alone in the room they are used to relaxing in while you are home. Start by stepping outside of the room when they are resting or when they are busy licking at a stuffed Kong® and returning whilst they remain relaxed. If they are already ok at staying in this room whilst you are home, do the same but with the front door.



Make them a safe zone – Choose a place in the house that's just for them – and make it super comfy and cosy. A comfortable bed, their favourite toys and a water bowl. Also ensure they have space to get up, stretch and wander around.



ADAPTIL® – This is to be part of your toolkit. Adaptil contains the dog appeasing pheromone which is clinically proven to help your dog cope with their anxiety. It is to be used alongside training and to help your dog with reducing the anxious signs they show. In a study, barking was reduced by 65%, signs of destruction by 91% and stress-related house soiling by 75%¹.



Make it positive – Using a filled Kong® or a LickiMat® can initially keep your dog occupied as you pop in and out. Licking is self-soothing for dogs so it can help with their anxieties, but you will need to ensure you provide these at other times and not just when you are rehearsing separation.



Dummy Runs – Incorporate picking up your keys, putting on your coat and putting on your shoes – as if you are leaving the house. Then progress to **repeat going in and out** over a 10-15 minute training period. If a certain part of the routine (such as you putting on your coat) causes particular stress, adapt the training to help them cope – try spending time with them while wearing the coat, or reducing the time you are away until you know they are adapting well.



Remain passive when you return – as though it is no big deal that you popped out.



Use a camera – so you can watch them and always return before they show any signs of distress.



Mentally tire them out – make sure they have plenty of mental stimulation before you leave and avoid fast-pace adrenaline-fuelled walks immediately before any separation training. If they are tired, they will be more likely to relax.



Leave the radio or TV on when you are out – this will help them feel as if they are not alone if they hear voices and sounds they are used to hearing while you are around. Music has been shown to have a calming effect on dogs - particularly classical music or even reggae and soft rock! However, it is important not to just associate this with separation – have it on whilst you are home as much as you can before you are due to leave.



Prevent uncontrolled separation – make sure you avoid leaving your dog past the point of them coping at any time, otherwise your training will be in vain and your dog will be getting more distressed about being home alone.

Get Extra Support - if you are struggling with your dog, always source help from your vet or qualified behaviourist.

Product recommendation for Separation Anxiety: ADAPTIL® Calm Home Diffuser

- Just plug it in where your dog will need to settle to make the area feel super safe and secure
- 4 weeks constant support
- Covers up to 70m² area (3 bedroom house approx.)

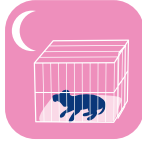


PUPPIES

Time for prevention?



If you have just got a puppy, there is time to prevent this issue. It is totally natural for puppies to follow you when they are young – This is a survival mechanism and they become more confident with independence as they grow older as long as they have a secure attachment from which they feel safe to explore, and as long as they are not left in a state of distress when left alone at any time.



Night time – From the first night, set your puppy up so that they have company and are not left to cry-it-out. Allow them time to settle into their new environment before expecting them to sleep through the night alone.



Encourage independence – From the start, ensure you provide your puppy with lots of toys to play with by themselves, items to chew and gnaw on, things to destroy (from cardboard to celery!), and food dispensing toys such as a snuffle mat, LickiMat® or Kong®.



Avoid helicopter paw-renting – Try to set up the environment so that you don't need to worry when your puppy goes quiet or is out of sight, so that you don't have to follow them everywhere and they can build independence. Equally, try not to respond to their every whim. Whilst we don't want to leave our puppies distressed at any time, they do need to learn that your attention is not going to be available all the time as soon as they want it.



Wait for them to be settled before leaving – Puppies should sleep A LOT so use this to your advantage. When you need to get things done, wait for them to settle themselves and potter around the house or pop out to spend time in the garden, put the bins out etc.



Go at your puppy's pace – Every puppy will vary in terms of their confidence about being left alone and it is important to go at your own puppy's individual pace. You will need to take time off work or arrange for cover whilst you build up your puppy being happy about left alone for as long as you might need them to be, and the time this will take will differ between puppies.



Crate training – A crate can be a useful area to make into a comfy, safe space. However, it is important never to shut a puppy in against their will. A puppy will only find it safe if they are happy to take themselves in there, so we need to train them to love spending time in their crate. Think about how vital a crate is for your situation and avoid shutting the door until they relax independently if you do want to use one.



Leaving the house – When you are confident that your puppy remains settled whilst you spend time in another part of the house or when popping out, you can leave your puppy home alone for a longer period but it would be sensible to watch on a doggy cam or video so that you can check how they cope.



Product recommendation for Puppy Prevention: ADAPTIL® Junior Collar

- Clinically proven to help reduce night crying, help puppies learn faster, comfort them when home alone and become confident and self-assured.
- Continuous diffusion for 1 month, replace every month as needed
- Convenient and easy to fasten buckle and should remain on at all times (except for when shampooing)



ADAPTIL® helps to reduce anxiety

How can ADAPTIL® help?

ADAPTIL® alone is not always going to sort all your dogs anxieties, but it can be part of your toolkit to help your dog cope with their anxiety. Like non-prescription products for anxiety in humans, there are support products to help deal with anxious feelings in dogs.

The dog fear ladder

The ladder diagram shows the different levels of fear your dog may exhibit. As your dog's anxiety increases they will move further up the fear ladder which will result in more extreme reactions being displayed.

By calmly helping your dog with coping techniques and plugging in an ADAPTIL® Calm Home Diffuser you can help them move down the fear ladder.

It's important to remember that if your dog is exhibiting level 5 fear these measures may bring them down to a level 3 which helps your dog cope better. They will still show a fear response to that stimuli or situation but will be in a calmer state. This can help training or redirecting onto something else.

All dogs are different, their fears are individual and their responses will vary.





Supporting your dog throughout their life



For more information go to: www.adaptil.com/uk

We are on instagram, facebook and twitter:



This leaflet was written in collaboration with Rosie Bescoby, Clinical Animal Behaviourist. Rosie Bescoby is a Certified Clinical Animal Behaviourist with a degree in Psychology and Zoology and a Post-Graduate Diploma in Companion Animal Behaviour Counselling, based in and around Bristol and North Somerset. Rosie is a full member of the Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors, a member of the Association of Pet Dog Trainers, and registered as both a Clinical Animal Behaviourist and as an Animal Training Instructor with the Animal Behaviour and Training Council.



For more information please visit: www.pet-sense.co.uk

1. Gaultier et al 2005.

