



C E N T E R F O R
Shelter Dogs

A PROGRAM OF THE ANIMAL RESCUE LEAGUE OF BOSTON

SEPARATION ANXIETY

Dogs with separation anxiety may bark/howl, be destructive and urinate and/or defecate in the house when left alone. The behaviors hardly ever occur when an owner is with a dog. All of the behaviors occur soon after the dog is left alone and may (barking) go on for hours. The destructive behavior tends to be centered around doors and windows. Dogs often chew doorways and windowsills or pull up carpeting by the front door.

Many dogs display signs of separation anxiety shortly after arriving in their new homes. Most get over it. Here are some things you can do to help your dog adjust sooner.

- **PRACTICE SHORT DEPARTURES** On our dog's first day in your home start to leave the house for very short times. It's very important to pay no attention to your dog when you do the departures. First just go in and out the door. If your dog doesn't panic, take the trash outside or pick up your mail. Then, leave the house for 5-minute intervals. Then try 10 minutes. If you take your car to work, make sure you drive your car away. Over the first two days, try to progress up to 30 minutes. Make sure you allow your dog to relax between departures. If your dog panics **SLOW DOWN!** Wait a couple of hours before doing another departure and make it short. The goal is to have your dog relax when left alone. If you are patient and don't go faster than your dog can tolerate both of you will be happier.
- **IGNORE YOUR DOG WHEN YOU COME AND GO** Making too big a deal of your departures will teach your dog to make a big deal of departures. Ignore your dog when leaving and don't have a party when you come back.
- **DON'T LET YOUR DOG BE A VELCRO DOG** Discourage allowing your dog to follow you everywhere. Staying in another room will help your dog learn that being alone is not dangerous. Don't allow your dog to sit next to you all the time. Resting and sleeping while not touching you will help your dog feel more confident when alone.
- **GIVE YOUR DOG A DELICIOUS AND LONG-LASTING CHEW BEFORE YOU LEAVE** Although many anxious dogs won't eat when left alone, some will and when they do, their anxiety is reduced. Leaving a very delicious chew may be something a dog just can't

refuse! Try a Kong toy or hollow marrowbone filled with either cheese spread or peanut butter and treats. Only give this toy before you leave. Pick it up when you come home.

- **NOTHING IN LIFE IS FREE** This is a program to teach your dog to politely ask for things before they are given. This is an easy way to become your dog's gentle leader and to decrease your dog's "Velcro" tendencies. All you do is to ask your dog to sit before you do anything for your dog. For instance: sit before being pet, sit before being greeted, sit before putting a leash on, sit before opening the door, sit before putting the food bowl down, sit before giving a treat, sit before throwing a ball, sit before getting in the car. Feel free to add things if you'd like.

If your dog had separation anxiety in the previous home we may have taught your dog to be comfortable resting and sleeping in a crate. As crating often increases anxiety, it's important that you **GRADUALLY** get your dog used to being crated when left alone. Here are things you can try to get your dog see the crate as a safe haven rather than a scary jail cell.

- Place the crate in a part of your house that you spend a lot of time (bedroom, kitchen)
- Work first with the crate door open. When your dog is comfortable entering, eating and resting in the crate with the door open, then close the door.
- Feed your dog meals in the crate. Allow your dog to enter the crate willfully. **NO FORCE!**
- Throw toys and treats into the crate for your dog to chase.
- Give your dog delicious long-lasting chews when crating. A Kong or hollow marrow bone filled with cheese spread or peanut butter and treats is perfect.
- When your dog is comfortable in the crate with the door closed, walk out of the room and then back in.
- Leave the room for 5 seconds, 10 seconds, 20 seconds, 30 seconds, 45 seconds, 1 minute, 2 minutes, 3 minutes, 4 minutes, 5 minutes. (See last bullet).
- Leave the house for 1 second, 3 seconds, 5 seconds, 10 seconds, 20 seconds, 30 seconds, 45 seconds, 1 minute, 2 minutes, 3 minutes, 4 minutes, 5 minutes, 10 minutes, 15 minutes, 20 minutes, 30 minutes. (See last bullet)
- When doing departures, ignore your dog's complaints. If they don't stop, go back to shorter departures. Do not let your dog out of the crate until there is little or no complaining