

As your dog becomes more independent, you should have fewer and fewer separation anxiety problems. Don't hesitate to seek help from an experienced trainer or dog behaviorist if you have difficulties. There are also books that address dog behavior problems you might find helpful, particularly one by Dr. Nicholas Dodman, appropriately called "The Dog Who Loved Too Much". Despite the distress separation anxiety causes both dog and owner, a little planning and training can go a long way in helping your dog learn enough independence to deal with your absences. It may take some time and work to achieve the desired level of behavior from your pet, but persistence pays. You and your dog will both be rewarded for your efforts.

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**Separation
Anxiety**

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If your dog is destructive or soils your house when you are not there, but is fine when you are home, he or she may suffer from separation anxiety. Also known as "dogs who love too much", these animals are devoted to their owners. They are never far from their favorite people, following them from room to room, even sleeping in the owner's bed if allowed. Owners usually enjoy this attention, feeling that their dogs truly love them, but because of their extreme psychological dependence, these same animals can have great difficulties coping with even brief separations from their owners.

Owners of dogs with separation anxieties may think their dogs soil the house or chew their clothing or furniture to "punish" them for leaving them at home, but that is not the case at all. Afflicted animals become very stressed when the owner is not present, not knowing when or even IF the literal "light of their life" will return. These dogs work themselves into a frenzy of stress, and are not consciously trying to punish anyone, they simply haven't learned how to quietly wait for their owners to come home.

Once left alone, these dogs will often chew, scratch or dig around windows or doors, seeking an exit in an attempt to rejoin their owner. They also will seek out items with the owner's personal scent, such as clothing (especially used underwear) or favorite chair, in an attempt to console themselves with the next-best thing—the owner's scent. Unfortunately for owners, chewing is a natural outlet for stress in dogs, which can lead to the loss of the seat-cushion or the garment the dog has been attracted to. Dogs with separation anxieties never display these destructive behaviors while the owner is at home, because these dogs feel secure in the owner's presence. (Destructive behaviors while the owner is home are due to boredom or attention-seeking.)

Another common result of the stress these dogs feel during separation is house-soiling. This is not to be confused with incomplete house-training, as these dogs do not have "accidents" while the owners are home. For these dogs even the briefest separation can result in soiling. It is simply a physical reaction to the dog's mental stress, and not a contemplated act of revenge or punishment. Just remember how people have frequent "urges" when stressed!

Dogs with separation anxieties, who "love too much", need help from their owners to overcome their excessive dependences. If you come home to a mess or chewed item, it will do no good to fuss at or punish your dog for the crime, since he or she didn't mean to do it to begin with, and won't

associate your anger with the "crime" anyway. (Remember, to be effective, corrections must be made during or immediately following the behaviors you are trying to change.) Rather than punishment "after the fact", prevention and de-sensitization are the best ways to modify the behaviors of these dogs.

If the dog is crate-trained, simply putting the dog in his or her crate prior to the owner's departure may be all that is needed to solve the problems of chewing or soiling. The dog can be left with a treat or chew-toy to occupy his time. Many dogs like the security of their "dens" and just snooze while waiting for their owners to return. However, if the separation anxieties are so great that the dog soils in the crate, barks constantly, or the owner does not wish to use a crate at all, additional desensitizing will be necessary.

Without realizing it, owners often reinforce their dogs' dependencies. Such owners may frequently speak to their dog, fondle it, or otherwise give the dog such constant attention that the animal cannot handle the lack of attention when the owner is not present. The amount of attention each of these dogs needs without being excessive varies for each individual, so owners must learn how much attention they can give these pets without going overboard and contributing to the problem.

To help a dog learn to handle owner absences, the owner must practice periods of ignoring the dog while he or she is at home. This means going about your usual business but without speaking to, petting, or even making eye-contact with your dog. Do this several times a day for at least 10-15 minutes initially, lengthening sessions as you continue. This will allow your dog the chance to develop some independence. It is often helpful to provide chew-toys or treats for the dog to amuse him or her self with during these periods.

Of course, the reason we have pets is to give them attention, so a great way to give appropriate attention to these dogs is through some form of training. Not only does training have it's obvious benefits (obedience, tricks, etc.), it also enhances the dog/owner relationship, and the dog is getting attention for actually doing something ("earned" attention), not just for existing. So between sessions of non-attention, schedule random brief (5 minutes or less) training sessions that will give your dog one-on-one "earned" attention. Exercise also helps to work off anxious energy, so walks or Frisbee/ball throwing sessions can count as attention/training sessions as well.

Excessive attention just before leaving and right after arriving home makes the dog's time alone seem even worse to him or her. Therefore, be fair to the dog and no matter how guilty you may feel about leaving the dog home, don't make matters worse by making a big fuss about it. If you usually have a TV

or radio on while you are home, leave it on while you are out. Try to make the departure and arrival non-chalant, as ordinary and unnoticeable as possible from the dog's perspective.

Desensitize the dog to your leaving by stepping outside into the yard for short periods while he is inside (loose or crated), saying nothing to him before you go or after when you come back for several minutes. When he can handle these situations without excessive anxiety, pretend you are actually leaving by following your usual routine of dressing and picking up the car keys. Give the dog (loose or crated) a toy for distraction (cheeze-wizz in a Kong-toy works great) and simply leave the house, drive around the block, and come back. Upon your return ignore the dog for several minutes while you go about your business, and then give him or her a brief acknowledgment, such as a pat on the head and a few quiet words. Then go back to your business without anymore attention to the dog for another period of time. Extend these mock-departures as the dog is able to cope, and vary the times, some short, some long.