

THE TOUGH LOVE PROGRAM!

Preventing separation anxiety in your newly adopted dog.

By Jane Marshall Dog Trainer

Separation anxiety in dogs is a serious emotional problem where the dog becomes panicked when his owner leaves. He may cause massive destruction in the home, bark and howl, urinate and defecate and if crated he may injure himself trying to escape. It is not uncommon in shelter dogs and dogs who have been through a traumatic event.

Although separation anxiety can be successfully treated, it is far better for the dog and your home, to prevent it in the first place.

Sensitive and insecure dogs who adore people are more prone to develop this anxiety disorder i.e. some of our sweetest dogs! If these dogs are allowed to attach themselves to their human family by constantly receiving non stop attention at home when they demand it, then they never learn to be confident and settle by themselves. Consequently, when the source of their comfort and entertainment (you!) leaves for work, they become completely panicked. These anxious dogs desperately need guidance and predictability in their everyday lives.

Although separation anxiety can develop immediately in a newly adopted dog, it more frequently develops over a period of one to several weeks. In this time frame, the dog becomes more and more attached to the owner and ultimately panics without them.

If, when you take your new dog home, you work the following program, your new dog will learn to be more comfortable in your absences. We call it: "The Tough Love Program" because it involves some ignoring of the dog, which many new adopters find hard to do! All newly adopted dogs will benefit from this preventative program, sensitive or not, at the minimum you will get a better behaved dog!

TEACH YOUR DOG TO CHEW ON KONG TOYS

Fill a Kong with wonderful treats that are easy to remove at first. Then feed all his meals to him in the Kong. See: www.Kongcompany.com for ideas on stuffing Kongs. Chewing is calming to dogs as well as entertaining. Give him his goody stuffed Kong only when he is in his crate or secure space. Give him 2 stuffed Kongs a day when you are home and others as you leave him. Make sure the ones he gets when you leave are filled with excellent stuff (chicken, cheese etc) Soon he will look forward to you leaving! When he is good at chewing on the Kong, only give them when you leave.

CRATE TRAIN YOUR DOG

(or create a secure space where he can be confined) **NEVER** confine your dog to a basement, laundry room or garage. Dogs like to remain where their pack lives. Leaving them in an area where you don't hang out together as a family is a form of isolation and punishment and creates **numerous** problems. The crate should always be placed in the den/family room or kitchen and if he is left behind a baby gate he should be in some space where you all live together e.g. an area in the kitchen.

You MUST crate your dog 2- 3 times a day (or put him in his special space) **when you are at home**. It only needs to be for 5-10 minutes. Give him a stuffed Kong and ignore him if he whines. Let him out when he is calm, so he again learns calm behavior gets him what he wants. If you only crate your dog when you leave the house your dog will associate this with you leaving and he will start to resist going into the crate.

Crating or confining your dog when you are home teaches him that he is OK alone, he either chews his Kong or settles down and naps. This skill needs to be learned when you are home, so he can make the same choices when you leave without panicking.

This skill is easily learned by puppies, but older dogs need a little more practice. Be patient. Being comfortable by themselves when you are home is a **critical skill** for dogs to learn, if they can do this as you walk in and out of the room, the chances of them tolerating your absences are better.

When you are getting your dog accustomed to the crate keep dropping food treats in it when he is not looking so he gets into the habit of going in his crate to look for good things!

CALM COMINGS AND GOINGS

Make sure he is in his crate or special area with a stuffed Kong five minutes before you leave, then leave the house calmly with a cheerful "goodbye" Leaving by a back door where he cannot see you go often helps. Leave a radio on or a white noise machine to cover sounds that may concern him. On your return, walk in, give a bright "hello" but **do not** let him out until he settles and is quiet. This might take time at first, but be patient, we are teaching him that calm behavior is rewarded. Practice going in and out of the house and into other rooms many times a day at first, for small lengths of time. Do not acknowledge the dog in these comings and goings.

TEACH "SIT" AND "WAIT"

(and other basic obedience exercises) Use food treats to help him get it right. Then ask him to sit and wait for everything he wants, e.g. to go out the door, to have his leash put on, before being fed, before you pet him. If he refuses to comply, walk away for a

minute, then come back and try again. Be patient, the dog is learning a whole new way of relating to you. This “learn to earn” routine helps build confidence and predictability. He has a job to do. If your dog comes to you and paws at you or barks at you for attention walk away, count to 10 and then call the dog to you, request a sit, and then give 5 seconds of gentle petting, so attention is given when you choose. Again the dog learns if he needs comfort he cannot demand it from you but he needs to go find a chew toy. This is a skill he will need when you are not there.

GOOD EXERCISE

Most dogs are under exercised. Young dogs need off leash aerobic exercise every day. If their exercise needs are not met, they will not be able to settle well when you leave. The dog needs to run till he is panting. 20 minutes off leash running, a visit to the dog park, playing ball etc or 45 minutes to one hour leash walking. This exercise must be **before** you leave the dog for the day.

AND NOW THE HARD ONE!

Do not over indulge your dog for the first few weeks, but make sure his needs are being met. Write a daily schedule for your dog and try and stick to it. Include in your daily schedule, walks, a grooming session, training sessions, several periods of snuggling(!), practice sessions in the crate, (make your own list) and the rest of the time the dog should be ignored. Just go about your day with a quick hi! here and there as you hang out with your dog. Make sure there are a selection of chew toys around and a nice cosy bed in his open crate, so he may go and play or snooze. You may call him to you for a 5 second petting when you choose (remember he must “sit”), and then continue on with your own day. It is during this “hanging out together” time that the dog learns the concept of down time and that he has to go and find something else to do for entertainment. This eases the dog into being left alone. It is the hardest thing for new adopters to do especially when the new dog is following you around looking for attention. Hanging out with ignoring should make up a large part of your daily schedule for the first three weeks. If you feel guilty, add more dog walks or training sessions to his daily routine and remember, by ignoring him you are actually teaching him a skill.

Many separation anxiety dogs are a combination of a sweet needy dog and an extremely caring adopter who constantly caters to the dogs needs, without providing predictable routines.

DO NOT HAVE THE DOG IN BED WITH YOU

At this early stage the dog is learning to be confident by himself. This close contact in bed with you not only encourages over bonding, but also gives the dog more responsibility than he can deal with. If he is allowed to sleep in the bed of the King/Queen of the household (you!) he is responsible for looking after you in the

daytime. This worries him when you are gone. Relieve him from this responsibility, put his crate or bed on the floor in your room but show him that you take responsibility for the household and he can relax in his own area and enjoy being a dog!

If, after one month on this program, your dog is totally calm when you leave you may ease up on some of the areas, giving more attention when you are together. Always remember dogs respond well to boundaries and limits that are fairly set and kindly enforced. Dogs like the security of you making good choices for them.

TIPS:

Sometimes people think of getting another dog to keep their anxious dog company. This usually does not help. Separation anxiety is created by an over bonding between people and their dog, another dog is not part of this relationship.

DAP (Dog Appeasing Pheromone) spray can help some dogs. This is a calming pheromone that comes as a plug in diffuser or spray. Some studies show that spraying a bandana that your dog wears can help some anxious dogs. A cloth soaked in DAP can also be tied near the dogs crate or it can be sprayed on the dogs bedding.

Do not leave your dog in a crate for more than 4-5 hours without a break on a regular basis. More than that is inhumane and will cause problems. Consider a pet sitter, doggy day care or confinement in a bigger space if you are out all day.

If you take time off work to help your new dog adjust to his new home, make sure you practice the routine you will have when you leave for work. Do not spend a week never leaving the dog then go to work on Monday for 8 hours. Instead, each day practice leaving for longer sessions as described above.

WHEN TO GET PROFESSIONAL HELP:

If the dog is vocalizing continuously (howling, barking) without settling

If the dog damages his crate

If the crate is “jumped” to another area of the room

If the dog drools and there is saliva in the crate

If the dog is urinating or defecating in his crate or space

If the dog is damaging entrances, doorways, walls or digging at sheetrock in your absence

Please call Jane’s **Help Line for Dogs: 929-9115** for a referral or your vet.

Please remember dogs who have already developed separation anxiety are in a state of extreme crisis and may need the help of drug therapy as well as professional guidance.