

Relieving Separation Anxiety

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Separation anxiety can be a very challenging problem emotionally for both dogs and their owners. When owners are absent, some dogs experience mild anxiety which may manifest as barking, whining, pacing, or destruction. Others will begin drooling, trembling, and may even defecate. In extreme cases, dogs can injure themselves by clawing at doorways, trying to jump through windows, or self-mutilating when crated.

In mild to moderate cases, the Thundershirt alone may be enough to calm an anxious canine. Put a Thundershirt on your dog ten to fifteen minutes before you leave, and give him an exciting chew item such as a stuffed Kong. Because you don't want your dog to associate these things only with your departures, be sure to first put a Thundershirt on your dog at other times, such as when playing, eating a meal, or when enjoying a wonderful chewie in your presence.

What if the Thundershirt alone does not solve your dog's separation issue? First, in the rare case that the anxiety is extreme as mentioned above, consult with a behaviorist as well as your veterinarian, as your dog may require medication in conjunction with behavior modification.

For mild to moderate separation anxiety, a trainer or behavior specialist can help, but for now, here are a few tips:

1. If your dog is left alone when you go to work during the week, make it a habit to take him for a long walk before you leave. The more pleasantly tired out your dog is, the less likely there is to be anxiety.
2. Leave something with your scent on it, such as a sweatshirt you've been wearing or a towel rubbed under your arms, in your dog's resting area. Your scent will provide comfort. (This is one reason so many dogs get into the laundry when their owners are gone!)
3. Be sure your dog has something to chew on or engage in that will keep him busy for at least thirty to forty-five minutes after you're gone. Excavating a well-stuffed Kong®, for example, will keep your dog busy and by the time he's done, he'll be tired out and will hopefully take a nap.
4. Practice short separations. Leave the house for 10 minutes, then come right back. The next time, go for 15 minutes. Build up the time you're gone, but also, make it unpredictable. So you might leave for 10 minutes, then 15 minutes, then 5 minutes, then 15 minutes again, slowly building up to longer time spent away.
5. Your emotions affect your dog. Keep your comings and goings friendly but low-key.

For more information on treating separation anxiety and other fear issues, please see [Don't Leave Me! Step-by-Step Help for Your Dog's Separation Anxiety](http://www.phantompub.com) (www.phantompub.com)