

ANIMAL HOSPITAL OF LANESVILLE

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Separation Anxiety in Dogs

By Dr. Rene Wingerter

Does your dog have problems with being left home alone? Do you worry about finding your house a disaster area when you return?

Sometimes destructive behavior while you are gone is simply due to a young or overactive pet being bored. However, a large percentage of dogs suffer from a syndrome called separation anxiety. With these dogs, they hate being left alone so much that they will literally have an anxiety attack. They will chew anything, soil in the house or bark constantly.

This anxiety is real; it is just as real for the dog as it is for a person who is afraid of heights. This problem can be seen in any age, any breed, but may be seen more often in dogs that are exceptionally attached to their owners or who have been rescued from an animal shelter.

There are several things you can do to help your dog if he suffers from separation anxiety. First of all, start by paying very little attention to your dog for 20 minutes before you leave and 20 minutes after you return home. Try to go about your business and ignore your pet in an effort to keep things calm and to avoid rewarding his behavior with attention. You can also help the active dog taking him out on a long walk before you leave or giving him special toys he only gets to play with while you are gone. Some toys can be made more special by hiding peanut butter or cheese inside them.

You can also desensitize your pet by putting on your coat or jingling the keys several times throughout the day without leaving. You can also step out the door and coming right back in several times. Do this until he no longer gets excited when he sees the usual preparations for your leaving.

There are some dogs that just get so upset when you leave that they cannot learn even with all of the above techniques. They need medication that is available to help them. Medication to control behavior problems is a whole new frontier for veterinarians. They will never replace behavior training, but they can be used for a short time to make the training more effective.

The number one reason pets loose their homes and often their lives is behavior problems. It seems appropriate that veterinarians would want to help.

If you would like more information, please feel free to call the Animal Hospital of Lanesville at 952-3643. 🐾