



GUNSTON ANIMAL HOSPITAL NEWSLETTER



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Separation Anxiety

By Joni L. Noel, D.V.M.

Does your dog love you so much that when you walk out the door or are out of sight for just a few minutes, she goes crazy? Does her love for you tear up the rugs, uncushion the cushioned couch, knock over your favorite vase, demolish your absolute, all time, favorite most comfortable shoes? If she is an absolute angel when you're home, or even your shadow, and only turns demonic when you're away, then she is probably suffering from separation anxiety. Most dogs with separation anxiety, as opposed to just plain bad behavior, only act anxious and destructive when they are unable to be with and see their owners. Beside the destructive behavior, she can excessively bark, house soil, attempt to escape, lose her appetite, become inactive, sad and depressed. Some can even get diarrhea, vomit and excessively coat lick.

So you ask, "Why does my precious pooch have this problem while the next door neighbor's pup is a perfect angel?" Well, it could be that your dog is a very dependent soul. She could have been left alone way too long as a puppy, abused or neglected before you acquired her, or she could have been one of the countless poor puppies that was transferred from home to home before finally ending up at your local animal shelter. She doesn't understand when you leave that she isn't being left yet again to a new stranger in a strange environment. Also, some dogs can be fine for years, then something changes and she suddenly acts out, and your favorite pillow is the best thing she's ever tasted. Maybe Mom or Dad went back to work, the kids left for college, or jobs changed and now longer hours are being kept. Bear in mind, she may think, "This is it! They're not coming back!" The stress then gets too much to bear and she acts out.

Now, how to tame this anxious beast. Do not punish. Once she begins to associate your return with punishment, her stress will only increase. The #1 goal is to teach her that she can trust in your return. A good exercise to start with is to make her sit and stay while you walk from one place to another. If she stays, give her a treat. If she moves, try it again for a shorter distance and less time, even if it's moving from the door to the couch. Slowly increase your time and distance. The next goal is to change your habits. Your dog is smarter than you think. She actually can associate certain things you do as clues to your impending departure. Such things as: kissing your spouse goodbye, getting your keys out, closing your briefcase, all can prepare her for your leaving and then her ensuing destructive behavior. So, do

something different from the norm. Grab your keys but don't leave, close your briefcase and go watch TV, kiss your spouse more often.

Also, always leave a radio or the TV on when you leave, and go out and invest in a Kong toy. You can stuff it with peanut butter then put it in the freezer. Give it to her right before you leave and she will work so hard to get the peanut butter out that she is oblivious to your departure. Or, take her for a long walk before you leave. This can help tucker her out so that she will likely spend her time sleeping while you're gone. This also gives her something to look forward to because she gets some great exercise before you leave.



Ultimately, the goal is to increase your pet's self confidence. Always in the beginning, start with baby steps. Leave only for a minute, then come back in and do not fuss over her. Just go watch TV. Once she is relaxed, then tell her "good girl." You are teaching her that when you leave, you always come back. Do this exercise for longer periods each time but bear in mind, if she becomes anxious at any point, cut the time in half and start over. For example, if she acts up after 2 hours, then go back to being gone 1 hour and work back up very slowly. She has to be confident that you will return each and every time. This will probably take at least a week, if not longer, to accomplish. Clomicalm®, which is a new anxiety drug, can also be used while you start your behavioral modification. It is not a sedative. It is designed specifically to work in conjunction with behavioral modification for separation anxiety. Once the new behavior is learned, the drug can be slowly weaned from her system. Obviously, as with any drug, a thorough physical and consultation with your veterinarian is in order to make sure this medicine is appropriate for your pet.

With the knowledge you now have of this disorder, you can be well on your way to elevating your pet's self confidence. With enough time and patience, your pet should quickly gain the knowledge that you love her as much as she loves you and that destroying your underwear and socks isn't such a great way to show you she misses you. Together, you can both change her anxious love and your tattered drapes into a peace you both can enjoy for a long time to come.

Fear of Thunderstorms in Dogs

By Teresa Levinstein, DVM

Does your dog disappear at the first sign of a thunderstorm? Do you find him hiding in the bath tub, trembling and shaking? Or does he whine and attach himself to you? These may be signs of thunderstorm phobias. Some of the other signs may be pacing, excess drooling, increased panting, inappropriate urinating or defecating, or attempting to escape.

Fear of thunderstorms is one of the most common behavioral problems noted in dogs. These fears may develop gradually or may come on quite suddenly. There is some thought that some breeds, such as herding dogs, hounds, or sporting dogs; may be predisposed to storm phobias. Studies have also been done that suggest that dogs adopted from shelters or rescue organizations may be more likely to develop storm phobias. This may be due to lack of socialization or lack of exposure to a wide variety of sights and sounds.

For many dogs, just providing them a safe quiet hiding place or turning on a radio or television will suffice. You should avoid comforting or soothing the dog because this may reinforce their fearful behavior. Instead, talk to him in a normal tone of voice. You should avoid punishing this behavior as well because it may increase

their fearful response.

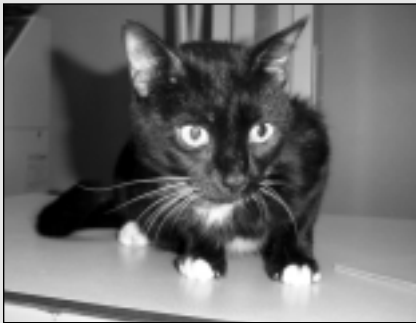
If your dog's signs are more severe, anti-anxiety medications and behavioral training may be necessary to overcome or ease his fears.

A recent study at the University of Georgia showed that almost all dogs demonstrated improvement in their response to storms after a trial of medication and behavior modification. The dogs were placed on an anti-anxiety drug for 90 days. A mild sedative was given before any anticipated thunderstorms and behavior modification training was started. The owners were given a tape of thunderstorm noises which was played very quietly at first, and then the volume was gradually increased while calm behavior was rewarded. The medications were then weaned off over a period of four weeks.

If you think your dog may benefit from this type of therapy, you should talk to your veterinarian about customizing a program for you and your pet.



DONATIONS NEEDED: If you have any old towels or blankets, our adorable and precious patients would love to cuddle and hide in them. Thank you!



Have a Heart

Have A Heart kitties that need a home. Please call us if you can give any of them a good home. The mom is so sweet and looks for attention. She would make a great new addition to your family. Thanks again to ALL of our wonderful clients who have made Have A Heart possible with your donations.



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www.gunstonanimalhosp.com