

Quick Guide to...[Separation anxiety](#)

This is actually a phobia. Puppies and adult dogs can become intensely afraid when they are left alone, or when their primary caregiver leaves.

Signs/ symptoms include:

Vocalising: howling, barking, whining, crying

Inability to settle: pacing, panting, shaking, constantly changing position

Losing control of bowels and bladder: they're scared, it's not a conscious choice

Destruction: using claws, teeth and body in an attempt to escape, to find the lost person, or as a way to deal with their overwhelming emotions

How to help your dog

Your dog is not doing this to annoy you. They are doing this because they are under a great deal of stress, and are often terrified. It's not possible for a dog to learn anything good while in this state, which is why separation anxiety can take a while to improve.

It's often the leaving and initial thirty minutes that's the problem. Once you can achieve calmness for this length of time, it's usually easier to lengthen the time you leave them.

Set up a remote camera so you can observe their behaviour.

Some dogs find it harder to be alone than others. You may need to find permanent solutions where they are not left for long.

Potential solutions include:

- Find **suitable doggy daycare**, or help from friends and family, so your dog will have company until you have put some changes and training in place. If your dog continues to experience this phobia, it will continue to be a problem.
- Do lots of **stay training**, using positive reinforcement, so your dog gets used to you coming and going around the house, and in and out the door etc. Reward for calmness. If they're not calm, make the training easier.
- A **long and engaging walk** before you leave them, to help them settle and sleep.
- **Ignore your dog for 20 minutes** before you intend to leave, then it's not such a big change when you shut the door.
- **Leave the radio or TV on** (with a mix of talking and music) for comforting sounds.
- Create a **den-like area** they can snuggle into, with an **item of worn clothing** so they can feel close to you.
- **Prepare a Kong** filled with wet dog food to place on the floor as you leave.
- **Ignore your dog on your return**, other than to let them out for a wee. Reconnect with them when the initial over-excitement has reduced.
- **Do not tell your dog off for any mess that has been created in your absence** – this only makes things worse, as it adds stress to an already very stressful situation.