BE RIGHT BACK!

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HOW TO OVERCOME SEPARATION ANXIETY AND REGAIN YOUR FREEDOM

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pitmore
PUBLISHING

Published by Pitmore Publishing

ISBN 978-1-9992966-0-5

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Cover image: Peter Collins Photography
Cover design: 100 Covers
Internal design: Amanda Baye
Beta readers: Vanessa McDonald and Jo Martin
Edited by: Jodi Brandon

Training plans in Appendix B based on the Academy for Dog Training Standard Plans and used with permission.

Author's Note
Throughout the book I've applied the masculine ***him***, ***he***, or ***his*** when referring to both male and female dogs. This in no way reflects a gender bias, but rather is used for simplicity. Some authors avoid this by referring to a dog as ***it***, but this is not how I, nor most owners, think of dogs.

RESULTS DISCLAIMER

While every effort has been made to accurately represent how to get your dog over separation anxiety there is no guarantee that you will. Even though separation anxiety training has a high success rate, there is never any guarantee with behavior change. Any professional who tells you otherwise is not being transparent.

Examples of successful cases in this book are not to be interpreted as a promise of results. Successful resolution is entirely dependent on the person doing the training, and on each individual dog's condition.

For India, Tex, and, of course, Percy

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For my husband, who believed in me when I said I had a dream of making this world a better place for separation anxiety dogs and owners. And for the rest of my family—especially my sister, Sandra—for being my biggest supporters.

For my mentor, Jean Donaldson, who not only gave me the best education any dog trainer could have, but who also taught me to think critically, to love science, and to believe that we can make this world a better place for our dogs.

For India, the dog without whom I would never have discovered how deeply I could love dogs.

For Tex, for being so complicated I was propelled toward science-based dog training.

For Percy, for forgiving me for leaving him to bark it out when I didn't know better. And for inspiring me to turn my dream into reality.

And finally, for all the separation anxiety owners and dogs in the world, who are all suffering needlessly, afflicted by a perfectly treatable condition. I wrote this book to give you hope.

CONTENTS

PREFACE

Owners of dogs with separation anxiety are dealt an impossible hand: Not only do you have a dog you can't leave, but you are also judged and denied the accurate information you need to get your dog over this perfectly treatable condition.

If this feels like you, then I wrote this book for you.

There are plenty of books on separation anxiety written by trainers for trainers—and books written by trainers for owners.

But this book is written by an owner for owners (admittedly an owner who is now a seasoned separation anxiety behavior consultant). Just like you, I know that getting over separation anxiety is about way more than a training plan.

With this book I give you the knowledge and survival techniques you will need. I want you to sidestep bad advice and lock into exactly what will get you and your dog over this.

When you feel most hopeless, know that I'm rooting for you. And I truly believe you can do this.

INTRODUCTION

"DO YOU KNOW YOUR DOG BARKS ALL DAY?"

I thought I was a good dog parent. We took ambling sniff-walks around the neighborhood, went on adventures in nature, and visited local parks for socialization. Then one day, my neighbor asked me, "Do you know your dog barks all day?" The simple answer: no, I didn't. Nor did I have any idea why he barked when I was away. This unexpected question led me down a path I wasn't prepared for. My dog, Percy, had separation anxiety.

I can't forget how I felt that day. The bottom had dropped out of my pet-parenting world. I had no idea Percy barked constantly while I was out. How could I have known? I'd

had India the cockapoo for a year and received no complaints. Percy, India's half-brother, joined our household when he was eight weeks old. I assumed he would be as easy to rear as she had been.

I couldn't bear to think of my dog barking all day, and I didn't want to get into trouble with the neighbors. I needed to get to the bottom of what was happening.

SEARCHING FOR AN ANSWER

As we all do in this age of the smartphone, I turned to Google. Type "dog barking all day" into any search engine and you'll get about a million hits, all with differing opinions and contradicting facts.

I wasted a lot of time going down rabbit holes but, thankfully, I eventually stumbled across resources that made sense. I learned that I had a dog with a phobia of being alone: separation anxiety.

The truth is that dogs who bark relentlessly and persistently for the entire time you are gone aren't being bad dogs. They are not mad at you for going out. They are in a panic. We don't know why, but for whatever reason, some dogs have a morbid fear of being left at home alone.

This was my Percy.

Once I realized that was what was going on with Percy, everything changed. Once I knew what I was dealing with—fear—I needed to find out the cause and how to make it better.

The internet has no shortage of explanations for why a dog might suffer when left. Here are some of the reasons I came across to explain Percy's distress (reasons I now know to be myths):

- Cuddling him (guilty as charged)
- Letting him sleep on the bed (guilty)
- Allowing him to go out of the door ahead of me (I'm going to bad dog parenting prison for this one.)
- Letting him eat first (Throw away the key.)

Apparently I was a terrible dog owner. Interestingly, though, I'd done all these things with India, and she was perfectly fine.

I also read that dogs get stressed when you leave if they think they're the "leader of the pack," so I needed to "show him who's boss." My four-month-old, fluffy white, four-pound puppy was hell-bent on world domination, and if I didn't act there would be a grisly end.

An internet favorite, which topped the list with friends and family, was to "just let him bark it out."

This particular advice says you don't need to do anything. Your dog's separation anxiety will fix itself.

This infers that to fix the problem, you must stop coddling your dog, stop pandering to him, and let him get over it. That is incorrect. It's not "difference of opinion" incorrect, it's scientifically and factually incorrect.

My biggest mistake as a newbie owner was buying into this. I let my anxious dog bark it out. It didn't work. In fact, I made things worse.

LIVING WITH A SEPARATION ANXIETY DOG

Once you know your dog is panicking every time you step out the front door, it becomes almost impossible to leave.

Learning this made life with Percy stressful. I had a dog with an uncontrollable fear of being left without human company.

Leaving for work, going out to dinner, going for a run, going shopping, accepting last-minute invitations—all of those were either impossible or came with the knowledge that I was likely making his anxiety worse.

My husband and I felt trapped in our own home—prisoners with two adorable, cuddly dogs for company.

We loved Percy to bits, but we needed to get our life back too.

What causes separation anxiety is one of the topics we cover in Chapter 1. The headline answer is we don't yet know why some dogs develop separation anxiety and some don't, but we know how to fix it.

I stopped trawling the internet for half-baked ideas about why it was happening and instead focused on a solution.

As a (then) dog training amateur, I fumbled my way through, but it seemed that the key to success was getting Percy used to being alone in tiny increments. I established that leaving him alone for longer than he could cope made his anxiety worse.

I needed to know what Percy was doing while we were away from home. For that I needed technology, so the "Percycam" became a thing.

The Percycam—like a nanny cam, but for our dog—enabled us to watch Percy while we were out. Without it we would have been clueless about how he was coping.

What I did then seems so rudimentary and clumsy compared to how I train now, but somehow I managed to see improvement. This approach worked when all the other advice had failed.

Eventually, I was able to show Percy that my short departures and small, non-stressful absences were not that scary. He could manage.

EVIDENCE-BASED TRAINING

This breakthrough got me hooked on evidence-based training. Everything you read in this book is based on evidence.

Before I knew there was a scientific approach to dog training, I, like many owners, thought that "knowing dogs" was what mattered.

Yet the more I dived into this world, and the more I learned about how dogs learned, the more I realized that evidence-based dog training is the key to helping a dog with separation anxiety.

It's science, pure and simple.

Dogs learn by association. They develop fear through association, and they learn to change their fear responses through association.

Dog training is not about anthropomorphizing your animal, nor voodoo magic, nor their "desire to please," nor a leadership mythology-base for learning.

It's about using techniques based on the laws of animal learning. The thing about this method is that it's based on science that we've known about for years. It's so old it seems new.

Not only did evidence-based training help me work through Percy's separation anxiety, it did so without me needing to shout, correct, alpha roll, or inflict pain with aversives.

Not only did evidence-based training help me work through Percy's separation anxiety, it did so without me needing to shout, correct, alpha roll, or inflict pain with aversives (such as a bark collar).

How can scaring or inflicting pain on an already-anxious dog help? Fixing fear with fear isn't the answer.

In the conclusion of this book, we detail why many of the tools marketed as fixes for separation anxiety don't work. For now, know that if your dog has separation anxiety, the way to get him over it is to gradually get him used to being on his own. It's as simple (or perhaps as complex) as that.

WHY I BECAME A TRAINER

After my experience with Percy's separation anxiety, I became hooked on force-free, evidence-based training.

My husband and I had such a challenging time trying to help Percy that I felt passionate about helping other owners and dogs avoid the same heartache.

I was so motivated that I gave up my corporate career, which had taken me around the globe, earned me top-tier frequent-flyer status, and had me sitting at the board table in some of the world's most prestigious corporations.

While I loved what I did, it didn't allow me to make a difference. People say you get the dog you need, not the dog you want. Percy was the dog I needed to wake me up.

I decided to become a dog trainer so that I could help dogs like Percy—and, just as importantly, owners of dogs like Percy. People who were struggling as my husband and I had.

I come from a career in which, to give advice, you need qualifications. So naturally, I wanted to become qualified in the field of dog behavior and training.

But dog training's dirty little secret is that, in most countries, anyone can legally call themselves a trainer, and there's no industry framework for consumer protection. However, lack of regulation is not an excuse for being unqualified.

Determined to do things properly, I signed up for what's known as the "Harvard for Dog Training": Jean Donaldson's Academy for Dog Trainers. And I studied under leading expert

Malena DeMartini, who wrote the seminal trainer's guide *Treating Separation Anxiety in Dogs*.

My journey, from my neighbor's comments, to helping Percy learn to overcome his own separation anxiety, to understanding that there is a "right," scientific, and evidenced-based method for helping him and other dogs, led me to being a trainer and a behavior consultant who has helped hundreds of dogs with separation anxiety.

As you go through this book you'll find practical tips and strategies for getting your dog over separation anxiety. You will also find links to the companion site that has resource files for you to download and print.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Your dog isn't being mad or bad. He has a panic disorder. You most definitely didn't cause this.
- Focus on what works, and block out what doesn't (and all the bad advice), to achieve success.

CHAPTER ONE

WHAT IS SEPARATION ANXIETY?

OVERVIEW OF SEPARATION ANXIETY

Dogs like company. They like to be with us.

Dr. John Bradshaw, a leading expert in canine separation anxiety, says in an article in *The Guardian*: "Most dogs hate being left on their own. . . . Dogs can be trained to cope with being left alone, but few owners are aware that they can (indeed, should) do this."

Other dogs may find being at home alone boring and frustrating.

How do you know which is which? Are they disappointed you left them, or are they freaking out? It's not as easy to know as you might think, but there are some telltale signs.

DEFINING SEPARATION ANXIETY

Dog separation anxiety is more than just a dog who's disgruntled that you've left him. Dogs suffering from this have a phobia of being alone. They display signs of panic when left for longer than they can handle.

These dogs get fearful on their own, but they are fine as long as someone—any human—is with them.

The true term for this condition is *isolation distress*, but *separation anxiety* is the commonly used name.

In some cases, the dog must be with a particular person or persons. But these cases are much less common than the dog who is fine as long as someone is with him. This version of home-alone anxiety is true separation anxiety. You may hear this referred to as *hyper-attachment.*

For the purposes of this book, *separation anxiety* will refer to both conditions. Chapter 4 looks at specific tactics for dealing with hyper-attachment.

COMMON SIGNS OF SEPARATION ANXIETY

The signs that we look for when deciding if a dog has separation anxiety are:

- Excessive barking, whining, crying, and howling.
- Chewing or destroying floors, walls, and doors, particularly around entrances.

- Frantic attempts to escape, sometimes to the point of self-harm.
- Soiling (especially when the dog is otherwise house-trained).
- Getting anxious well before you leave.

It's common to think that a dog needs to display all these behaviors to be diagnosed with separation anxiety. I often hear owners say, "I don't think it can be separation anxiety because all he does is bark" or "It doesn't seem like separation anxiety because he destroys but the neighbors haven't complained about howling."

In fact, some anxious dogs don't display any of the more common problem behaviors but instead show some of the other signs of fear shown here:

Licking	Panting
Salivating, drooling	Whining, low-level crying
Freezing	Hiding
Withdrawing	Trembling
Eyes-wide	Ears pinned back
Tail tucked	Pacing
Cowering	Shaking

Separation Anxiety: What Else Could it Be?

We identify separation anxiety by looking at home-alone behavior in its entirety, rather than just one or two behaviors. When we evaluate a dog we always need video footage. We're looking for the presence of fear-based, persistent behaviors that only happen (or get much worse) when you are out.

Assessment can be hard, mainly because lots of things that dogs do when home alone can be caused by other triggers, not just by separation anxiety.

The following summarizes what might be going on, if not separation anxiety:

Problem Home-Alone Behavior	If it's not separation anxiety, what else might be going on?
DESTRUCTION	• A bored dog playing and having fun • A teething puppy trying to soothe his sore gums • Mice or other infestations in the home • Senior dog cognitive issues • Noise or storm phobias
HOUSE SOILING	• Medical issues • Housetraining slip-ups • Left too long without a pee break • Some medications • Cognitive dysfunction • Diet change • Parasites
BARKING, HOWLING, WHINING	• Noises in the street • Noises in an apartment block • Someone at the door • Another dog howling • Noises in the home • Boredom

What *Isn't* Separation Anxiety?

The main challenge with identifying separation anxiety is that bored or frustrated dogs can often display seemingly similar behaviors (in particular, barking, chewing, and destroying).

This can be confusing, but the behaviors listed in the previous chart are often more intense and last longer in anxious dogs.

Take the FOMO (fear of missing out) dog, who can't bear to think there's something exciting going on without him. As soon as you leave, the dog starts to bark. It might begin with a "Hey, I think you might have forgotten me?" but it quickly escalates to a "You can't go out without me!" tantrum. FOMO dogs keep going until they realize the barking isn't working. They give up and slumber through the rest of your absence.

Then there is the watchdog barker, whose life's mission is to alert you to threats to your survival, such as the UPS guy. These dogs might sit at the window baying at every passerby the entire time you're out. They'll be even more into this type of behavior if you don't let them do it when you're home.

Other home-alone dogs chew because they're bored. Some might soil while you're out, because they've learned that it's safer to pee on the carpet when you're not there to yell at them.

None of these dogs are anxious. They may be bored, frustrated, and/or amped up, but they're not in a panic.

Contrast those examples with a dog with separation anxiety, who is so worried that the barking continues to escalate for the entire time you are gone, or the panicked dog, who is so upset he rips his nails, trying to dig his way out.

I categorize this home-alone behavior into "thinking" and "emotional."

Thinking behavior is the dog strategizing. If the dog could talk, we might hear him say, "If I bark loud enough, they might come back and take me for that walk they seem to have forgotten about" or "This table leg looks fun. Think I might settle down and chew on that for the afternoon."

> Bored or frustrated dogs can often display seemingly similar behaviors (in particular, barking, chewing, and destroying) to dogs with separation anxiety.

Dogs, like any evolved animals, will put as much effort into a behavior as justifies the outcome. If barking and barking to go out for a walk doesn't eventually result in a walk, the thinking dog will give up. Dogs do what works.

Emotional behavior, on the other hand, has no such calculated logic or intent. Most likely the dog has no control over the behavior. He doesn't think. And it looks like the dog is incapable of stopping.

When the barking or chewing comes from fear, the behavior will persist for as long as the fear persists.

It's a bit like screaming on a roller coaster: It stops when the roller coaster stops.

Patricia McConnell, in her influential book *I'll Be Home Soon*, suggests that the acting-out behaviors may be self-soothing. And therein lies the reward for the effort.

This confusing overlap in home-alone behaviors can confound, but if I had to pick out one key difference between fearful dogs and bored dogs, it is perseverance.

> Emotional behavior is a bit like screaming on a roller coaster—the screaming stops when the roller coaster stops.

Ask the owner of a separation anxiety dog how long their dog does his thing, and the answer is usually "For as long as we're out."

As I explain in this book, each case of separation anxiety is different, and it's hard to generalize. Some dogs display problem behavior intermittently during an absence. The majority do it for the entire time.

Hyper-Attachment

These are the dogs who are glued to your side, no matter where you are in the house. VELCRO® dogs don't always have separation anxiety. Lots of dogs like to be their owner's shadow but don't panic when their owner leaves the house.

Some studies have shown that dogs with separation anxiety may also be hyper-attached to their owners. That *doesn't* mean separation anxiety is caused by having an extra-strong bond with your dog. Owners who have had multiple normal dogs who were attached to them will tell you they didn't do anything differently with the dog who developed separation anxiety.

Later we discuss in more detail why tactical approaches to stopping the symptoms of separation anxiety don't work. For now, just know that until we tackle the cause of the emotional barking, chewing or soiling, we cannot stop it.

"Why Does He Only Do it When I'm Out?"

If your dog soils the house when you're gone it could be anxiety or it could be a housetraining problem. It can seem like he's being sneaky or defiant. However, neither of these is his motive.

Anxiety

Dogs who only soil the house when they are home alone may be stressed by being left. If you're certain it's not happening at any other time, then you could be dealing with separation anxiety. First, check for any other symptoms, such as destroying, chewing, or vocalizing. Have your neighbors complained about barking? Can you see any signs of chewing or scratching?

Second, make certain the soiling is only happening when you're absent. Take a good look around the house, especially out-of-the-way rooms. Make sure he's not sneaking off to potty in a quiet place away from you.

If you confirm he's only having accidents when he's alone, and if you suspect any of the behaviors we associate with anxiety (e.g., destroying, chewing, or vocalizing), then chances are your dog has separation anxiety.

A Housetraining Problem

Do you take your dog out for a potty break only for nothing to happen? Or do you wait at length for him to go without success, only for him to do his business when your back is turned? Some dogs develop reverse housetraining. They are uncomfortable going in front of you, whether that's in the yard, on walks, or at the park.

Your dog has decided going in front of you is a bad idea. Dogs are masters of discrimination and experts when it comes to working out what's safe and what's dangerous. If, in the past, you scolded or punished him for going inside, he might have decided it's not safe to go when you can see him. When you go out, the coast is clear, and that's why you come back to a soiled carpet.

***

It's important to know whether it's a housetraining issue or whether your dog is anxious when you leave. If it's anxiety, follow the advice in this book. If it's housetraining, go back to basics with his potty training. You can read more about housetraining in Appendix B.

Causes of Separation Anxiety

"Is it my fault my dog has separation anxiety?" This must be the most common question dog owners have when they first find out their dog has separation anxiety, and it can be hard to ignore the suggestion that you are the cause of your dog's distress.

You may feel guilty—guilty because you believe that you are the reason why your dog has separation anxiety. You think failure as an owner (your lack of leadership) has caused your dog immeasurable suffering.

That's what common dog training myths would have you believe, what Google searches have told you, and what some trainers might have said, but you didn't cause your dog to develop a panic disorder.

Neither you, nor your dog, is at fault.

Owner-blaming seems to come from our need to determine why dogs have separation anxiety, despite no one really knowing why. Pinning the blame on owners is too simple, and there's a good chance it will leave you with a bucketload of unwarranted guilt.

CASE STUDY

Lucy and Bobby

When Even an Experienced Trainer's Dog Develops Separation Anxiety

If any case demonstrates that your dog's separation anxiety is not your fault, it's Lucy and Bobby. Lucy is a champion flyball dog trainer. She's a certified pet dog trainer, too. She's trained more than 30 of her own dogs and helped scores of owners with their own dogs.

Yet, Bobby, a world class flyball dog, developed separation anxiety. Lucy treated Bobby no differently than all the other dogs she'd ever had: She

crate trained, obedience trained, and gave him more enrichment than any pet dog could ever get—but somehow he ended up not being able to handle being home alone.

This rocked Lucy. My first job was to assure Lucy that this situation was not her fault. I helped her see that more likely Bobby came hardwired this way. If it was something Lucy was doing wrong, then she would have seen this condition in her previous dogs.

Once I convinced Lucy to stop beating herself up, I started Lucy and Bobby on a customized training plan. Despite her experience as a trainer, Lucy recognized that separation anxiety was out of her comfort zone. Just as I wouldn't be able to train a champion flyball dog, she wasn't comfortable getting her dog over separation anxiety.

Lucy's training was extremely successful. She stopped leaving Bobby and stuck rigidly to the training exercises I developed for her.

Bobby is now okay on his own while Lucy is at work. He chills in the morning until the dog walker comes and then settles again until Lucy returns home in the evening.

If you're thinking that you caused your dog's separation anxiety, and if you are thinking that it's going to be tough to crack, know that Lucy, a seasoned trainer, thought this too. She got her dog over it, and there's a good chance you can too.

Our Need to Know Why

Psychologists say that avoiding uncertainty is one of the biggest drivers of human behavior. When we don't have answers, we zero in on getting a concrete explanation. If we can't get an explanation, our brains are programmed to fill the void.

Maria Konnikova, PhD, author of *Think Like Sherlock Holmes*, puts it like this:

> The human mind is incredibly averse to uncertainty and ambiguity; from an early age, we respond to uncertainty or lack of clarity by spontaneously generating plausible explanations. What's more, we hold on to these invented explanations as having an intrinsic value of their own. Once we have them, we don't like to let them go.

We have a wealth of evidence-based information about dog behavior, but science doesn't give us all the answers. Sometimes, the answer is "We just don't know."

Looking for Answers

When it comes to separation anxiety, it's not surprising you want answers. Your dog goes bonkers when you so much as think of leaving, while all of your friends' dogs are settled happily at home.

Since we can't ask our dogs what caused their separation anxiety, we come up with our own ideas. We can neither prove nor disprove most of our theories, and they take on a life of their own, forever cemented in popular dog culture.

We love these concepts because they give us answers, and, more significantly, they seem to put the solution within our grasp. *If I don't let my dog follow me to the bathroom, then he won't be as clingy. Therefore he won't get upset when I leave. Or If I'm less stressed, my dog will be calmer.*

These seemingly straightforward solutions can be crushing. They are just too simple and set owners up for failure—while dishing out a large side serving of guilt.

What We Know about the Causes of Separation Anxiety

We can't ask dogs why they have separation anxiety, but we can study them to get more information about what might be going on. The factors that contribute to separation anxiety have been studied. (See the Resources for information on some of the research.)

Here's the long and the short of it. There's conflicting evidence about:

- Owner attachment,
- The make-up of the owner family,
- Breed, and
- The impact of being surrendered to a shelter.

In other words, there's no conclusive evidence that anything you did when your dog was a puppy or how you currently relate to your dog has caused his separation anxiety.

This makes complete sense when you consider the numerous owners who come to me saying, "I've had dogs all my life and never had one with separation anxiety before." I've even had world-champion dog trainers say this to me.

Could it be that these lifelong dog owners did something differently with their current dog? Possibly.

More likely, though, that dog was on a trajectory to develop separation anxiety.

Returning to causes, there's a little more consistency in the research about:

- Early life experiences playing a part.
- How big life changes can impact a dog's separation anxiety. (That said, what are you going to do? Not move? Never change jobs? Not start a new relationship?)
- Dogs sourced from a pet store being more likely to develop separation anxiety.
- Dogs who are rescued at an older age being more prone to separation anxiety. (The verdict is still out on whether this is cause or coincidence.)
- The dog's sex. (Male dogs tend to be more prone, according to most studies.)

Could You Have Done Things Differently?

While I don't believe we, as owners, cause our dogs' separation anxiety, I do think that, had we known our dogs were on a path to getting separation anxiety, we might have been able to take preventative measures. That's entirely different from saying we caused it.

Let's look at an analogous example.

Some dogs have a fear of strangers. In order to prevent this from happening, we use puppy socialization to safely introduce

a puppy to as many people as possible. We also go out of our way to ensure that our puppy doesn't have a fearful experience of people.

Socialization doesn't guarantee there will be no stranger fear, but it's the best chance we have to avoid the problem. Lots of dogs who aren't properly socialized don't go on to develop fear. But when dogs do, it's often down to a lack of solid socialization.

Socialization is the best chance we have to avoid fear problems.

When a dog does develop a full-blown fear of strangers, we don't say that you made your dog scared of strangers—but we might wonder if the dog had sufficient, appropriate socialization. Still, that's not the same thing as saying the owner caused it.

Yet, when a dog develops separation anxiety, our first reaction is often that it's the owner's fault.

Teaching a dog to be home alone is not on our list of socialization activities, though. We work to prevent fear of car journeys, the vet, the groomer, strange surfaces—the list is endless. But rarely are we encouraged to work on getting a dog used to being alone.

Rather, we take for granted that our dog will be fine on his own. A survey by the American Kennel Club suggested 83% of dogs are fine at home alone. While this means a large proportion of the dog population struggles when left, most don't, so this

is not a bad bet. And so we leave them, regardless of whether they will be able to cope or not. If you've had 10 other dogs, that might have worked for all 10—just not your current one.

If I had to suggest one change for early dog ownership, never assume that a dog will be okay on his own. Err on the side of caution. We socialize puppies regarding things they might never go on to fear. So just because 80% of dogs don't need to be taught to be alone, doesn't mean it's not worth doing it for every dog.

If we took that approach, we'd never socialize a dog to anything.

Early learning doesn't fix a problem. Some dogs go on to develop a fear despite early learning. Some dogs don't ever develop a fear even without early learning. But early learning is the best chance we have.

One last point in the "Did you cause it?" debate: While owners are accused of causing their dog's separation anxiety by being too soft or babying their dogs, one thing that contributes to separation anxiety that nearly every separation anxiety owner does or has done is to leave their dog for longer than he can cope with.

We don't do this because we thought it would make it worse but, rather, most likely because we were told doing so would fix it.

If You Didn't Cause it, Can You Treat It?

The good news: While we don't have a definitive answer as to what causes separation anxiety, we do know how to fix it.

With separation anxiety training we do practice departures that are so short the dog doesn't get anxious. We stay below what we call the dog's *anxiety threshold*. In this way we reprogram the

dog's brain from associating absences with fear to associating absences with nothing much at all.

Study after study shows that carefully getting the dog used to graduated departures is the best way to treat separation anxiety. (This method works even better when you use anxiety medications alongside the training, which we discuss in later chapters.)

If you are soul searching about whether you caused your dog's separation anxiety, you are likely missing out on valuable time that could be spent fixing it.

Solving separation anxiety is within your control.

Solving separation anxiety is within your control. That might feel like an immense amount of pressure, but with the right help and support, I'm hoping you'll feel empowered and optimistic. I wrote this book to help you learn about and understand how to help your dog's separation anxiety.

Please stop feeling guilty. You do not need to, and it's not good for you or your dog. You are already on the start of your journey to help your dog's separation anxiety.

8 SEPARATION ANXIETY MYTHS WE NEED TO BUST

As if trying to overcome our dog's separation anxiety wasn't hard enough, as owners we have to deal with a huge amount of inaccurate and misleading information.

Most of the advice is well-meaning, but unfortunately a lot of it is just wrong. Before we go any further, let's bust some of the myths surrounding separation anxiety and its treatment. See how many of these you've come across.

MYTH #1
You Caused Your Dog's Anxiety

As I've covered previously, nobody knows what causes separation anxiety. Experts don't agree, so how can we say that something you did caused your dog's separation anxiety? Owner blaming becomes even less reasonable when we factor in that separation anxiety may be genetic or that it could be the result of what happened to your puppy before he came home with you.

Your dog's separation anxiety could have been caused by any number of things. Nobody knows.

What *do* we know? Letting your dog sleep on the bed, allowing him on the sofa, and letting him walk ahead of you when you're out are not the reasons your dog has separation anxiety. Ignore anyone who tells you otherwise.

We know leaving a dog who has separation anxiety for longer than he can cope with can make his condition worse.

We also know life changes can have a big impact, but there's not a lot you can do here. (I don't expect you'll hold off on moving in case your dog develops separation anxiety!)

That said, you can manage absences. This means finding a way not to leave your dog, whether by using daycare, sitters, or dog walkers.

Not leaving your dog has an immediate positive impact on your dog's quality of life and sets your dog up for successful training.

MYTH #2
Getting Another Dog Will Help

This seems like an obvious solution. He's lonely and needs company. Unfortunately, for the vast majority of dogs, getting another dog doesn't help.

Another dog in the house might even make things even worse. Your new dog might alarm bark to protect the house and trigger your separation anxiety dog.

And what if the two dogs don't get along?

Getting a new dog is a huge decision, so before you add a new member to the family, weigh the pros and cons.

MYTH #3
He Understands He Did Something Wrong because When You Returned, He Looked Guilty

We used to think that "sneaky" look your dog had when you came home to destruction was a sign of a guilty dog, and it can seem like guilt. But if your dog is cowering with his ears back and his tail tucked, that's fear, not guilt.

Why do they respond with fear? Well, dogs are world champions at making associations. The last time your dog damaged something, you probably walked through the door and got mad—an understandable reaction to walking into a disaster zone.

Your dog will think the same thing is going to happen again. Unfortunately, your dog has no idea why you're mad! Sometimes your walking through the door means you're angry. So, he gets scared when you come home.

Alexandra Horowitz, a canine cognition scientist, conducted an experiment on "that guilty look." She demonstrated that people will see "guilt" in a dog's body language when they think the dog has done something wrong. In the experiment, it didn't matter whether the dog had done something: What mattered was the owner *thought* he had.

Dr. Horowitz explains in a 2009 interview on the NPR program "Talk of the Nation":

> It's not that dogs don't feel guilt—we don't have an answer to this one way or the other yet—but rather that the slinky look you see when you come home isn't guilt. Most likely it's fear.
>
> The next time you come through that front door to a huge mess, try not to scold your dog. He didn't do it to be bad. He's not mad at you. He panicked when you left. That's all.

MYTH #4
Using a Crate Will Fix It

We used to think that crating a dog would help home-alone anxiety. But here's the thing: Many dogs with separation anxiety also have a phobia of crates. For these dogs, crating adds to their panic.

Do we know why crate phobia and separation anxiety seem to go hand in hand? Not really, though if I had to guess I'd say the crate might add an extra level of isolation for a dog who already feels scared when alone.

Or maybe a dog with separation anxiety has just spent too many long absences in his crate and has come to associate the crate with scary alone time.

Yet, if you have a dog who's chewing the walls or ripping up the floorboards, a crate can feel like the only answer. It does stop the damage to your house, but you risk severe physical and psychological damage to your dog.

Panicking dogs will harm themselves trying to escape. The memory of the panic is lasting.

So-called anxiety crates are no use either. These supposedly indestructible crates may be just that—but dogs still manage to injure themselves. And even if there's no physical harm done, the neurological damage of locking a panicking dog in a cell-like crate may be irreversible.

I'm not anti-crate. Far from it. Crates are invaluable tools for containing excitable dogs who try to knock over visitors or for confining dogs while at the vet or the groomer.

To an anxious dog, though, a crate is not a safe haven. It's a punishment. So what can you do to protect furniture, walls, and your dog? Here are a couple of things:

- Try a confinement area using baby gates and room dividers. Then, video your dog when you're out. Some dogs will improve simply because they are no longer in a crate.

- **Manage alone time so you don't leave your dog long enough for him to go into a panic. That may sound daunting, but it's more doable than you think. Remember: This doesn't mean you have to stay with the dog. It means you need to make sure someone—anyone—is there.**

CASE STUDY

Jo and Max

An Exception to the Crate Rule

When Jo and I first started working together, Jo had been working on separation anxiety training, and she has also put a lot of effort into crate training Max.

She hadn't made the progress she had hoped for, though.

I explained that her separation anxiety training could be tidied up with a more precise, custom training plan. We also talked about crating. Jo wanted to keep crating Max, as this was the only way she was able to prevent him from getting access to windows (where he would bark).

I say to any owner who wants to continue to crate that, as long as you compare the dog's anxiety threshold in and out of the crate, and you take the time to get them comfortable in the crate, then give it a go.

Jo did both of these. When she compared Max's anxiety baseline in his crate, he actually did better than when out of his crate. As such, I encouraged her to continue.

After lots of training and plenty of hard work by Jo, Max can now be left comfortably in his crate for two and a half hours while Jo is out.

Max and Jo show that it is possible to crate a dog when you leave. They also show that it must be done properly, though, and that it can often

be more work. If you do decide to crate, make absolutely sure you put as much time into getting your dog to love his crate as Jo did with Max.

MYTH #5
If You Let Him "Bark it Out," He Will Eventually Stop

Barking can be a means to an end, or it can be an emotional response. Think about the child who uses "crocodile tears" to get you to buy her an ice cream versus the child who cries when she trips and cuts her knee. These are two distinct types of tears. You might ignore your child's crocodile tears but give her a hug when she falls.

When your dog uses barking to get what he wants, letting him bark it out does work. The dog thinks, *Hmm, this isn't getting me anywhere. I guess I'll give up.*

The barking that comes from their fear of being alone doesn't die out. In fact, this kind of barking can spiral. Your dog isn't barking with an end in mind. It might start out as "Hey, where did you go? Come back!" but as long as the fear remains, the barking will continue. Anxious dogs don't think clearly. The longer you leave a dog who has separation anxiety, the more fearful he will become and the more he will bark.

If you have left your dog to bark it out, don't be hard on yourself. It's easy to assume your dog tried a sort of "crocodile tears" method, and you did not realize he was panicked.

How can you identify different types of barking? It can be tough. Video is your friend. A dog's body language gives us clues as to whether he's upset or not. If in doubt, film your dog while you're out and enlist a professional to help you work out what's what. (For more on how to handle different types of barking, see Appendix E.)

MYTH #6
Giving Your Dog a Food Toy Will Stop the Anxiety

A common sign of stress in dogs, as with all animals, is a decrease in appetite. From an evolutionary perspective, this makes sense. Stress is a response to a threat. In the wild, when the gazelle spots the lion, he's thinking about survival, not snacks. When fear hits, the body needs to channel energy into dealing with the threat. The digestive system takes a back seat.

So, for a good number of dogs with separation anxiety, food isn't the answer. If you own a dog with separation anxiety, you might recognize this. You go out and leave the most delicious Kong or the stinkiest bully stick. When you return, he hasn't touched the food. It's only after you're back that he gobbles it up.

That said, not all dogs with separation anxiety lose their appetite when they are alone. In fact, sometimes we see that dogs eat more—and with greater intensity. These dogs are still upset. They just have a different way of showing their stress. As soon as they've finished their food, they begin their repertoire of home-alone behaviors.

Food hasn't made these dogs less anxious, but it has distracted them from the stress. Time and time again we see dogs who cope for 30 minutes to an hour when they have food, fall apart once they've finished eating the food.

It's better to help a dog become comfortable on his own than to use food props. After all, is a Kong going to last all day while you're at work?

There is a time and a place for using food for separation anxiety training, and we explore this in Chapter 7.

MYTH #7

Your Dog Soiled the House/Chewed the Floor to Get Back at You for Going Out

Dogs don't think the way humans do. They don't have the same motives for acting.

Dogs' motives are simple: Does this work for me? Does this make my life better or worse? They are innocently selfish. Thus, the notion of "getting back at you" isn't something that could be in your dog's head. When you go out, a dog with separation anxiety is in a panic, feeling unsafe and fearful.

Chewing, defecating, or urinating in the house helps anxious dogs in the same way nail-biting can help some anxious people. Your dog did what he did because he couldn't help it—not because he's mad or bad or seeking revenge.

MYTH #8
Puppies Don't Have Separation Anxiety

We used to think that puppies do not get separation anxiety—that when puppies bark, they are barking for attention. While lots of puppies do demand bark, experts now believe genetics might play a part in separation anxiety.

Research is ongoing, but we know now there's a gene for separation anxiety in humans. In 2018 a University of Helsinki study identified a gene for fear in dogs and humans. It's fascinating to consider that some puppies could come hardwired for separation anxiety.

Even if it's not in the puppy's genes, early life experience can bring on separation anxiety in young dogs.

All this could mean that your puppy may have had separation anxiety even before you picked him up.

So, if your puppy barks his head off when you leave, don't assume it's normal. Catching separation anxiety early can make all the difference to treatment.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- You didn't cause your dog's separation anxiety.
- We don't really know why dogs develop separation anxiety.
- Even though we don't know why they develop separation anxiety, we do know how to fix it.
- You can be the one to turn your dog around.

CHAPTER TWO

LIFE WITH SEPARATION ANXIETY

Once you find out your dog has separation anxiety, your life is never the same.

It's a ridiculously tough condition. I've often heard owners who've had multiple dogs in their lifetime say they've never had to deal with anything as difficult as separation anxiety.

The two big game changers when you find out your dog has separation anxiety are:

1. You struggle to stop the barking, chewing, soiling, self-harm, or whatever your dog does while you're out.

2. You realize that you can help him to get better, but that means not leaving him until he recovers and sticking diligently to training for months rather than weeks.

Treating separation anxiety takes time, and one of the most critical aspects of getting a dog over the condition is that he must not be left for longer than he can cope.

On top of that, the only way to stop the problem behavior in the short term is to stop the anxiety. When dogs are anxious, they will put more effort into futile behaviors (barking, whining, crying) than they would if calm. They are not thinking straight, and they do not give up.

If you leave your dog to try to figure it out on his own, hoping he will give up, chances are he won't.

Meanwhile, he will become more and more upset because it does not matter how much he barks, scratches, or chews: You don't come back. If your dog thought that being alone was terrifying, he now thinks that you are never coming back—which is even more terrifying. Eventually you do come home, whether 15 minutes or three hours later, to a home that may be destroyed. Your dog's immediate reaction will always be "So if I bark and bark and bark, she will come back."

You know and I know that's not why you came back, but your dog doesn't understand that you were not going to leave him forever. All he knows is that you were gone, he panicked, he went over threshold, and then you came back. Dogs learn by association and consequences. Your dog barked. You came back.

To him, barking makes you come back. The crying or chewing could be his coping strategy while he tries to call for you. He might find the chewing soothing.

Dogs do what works. So, the next time you're out, your dog will use the same tactics (barking) that got results (your return) the last time. He will yelp sooner and for longer, because it might bring you back. He might chew earlier and with more intent, because the chewing feels good.

Panic Changes the Brain

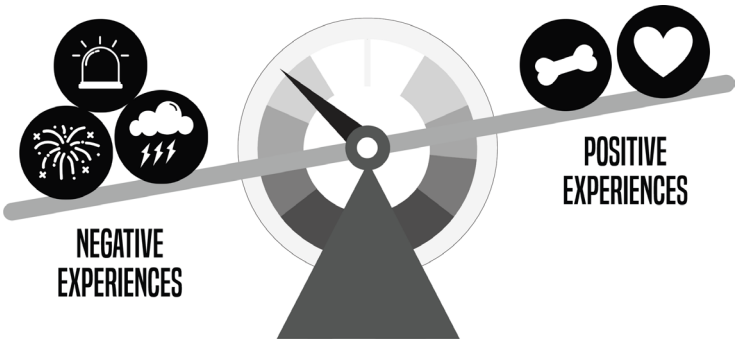
Studies show that panic causes a dog's brain chemistry to change for the worse. The same changes occur in humans when they experience prolonged panic. It's as if panic feelings leave "fear" written on your dog's brain with a thick, black permanent marker. The more your dog panics, the more fearful he becomes, and the more likely he is to become more fearful in the future.

The longer the panic goes on, the more dismal things can get. If you decide to gamble on the "let him get over it" strategy, you are taking your chances with your dog's brain chemistry. Fear is easy to get, but hard to lose.

We Need to Shift the Balance of Experiences

Research into human brains has shown that it can be incredibly difficult to outweigh the effect of previous negative experiences with positive ones. Think of the negative and positive experiences as being on either side of a teeter-totter (seesaw). When you first start dealing with a dog with separation anxiety, the

teeter-totter is heavily weighed down with negative experiences. Not only that, but the fulcrum is shifted, so it takes a lot more positive experiences to outweigh each negative one.



This means that even as we work to show our dogs that being alone is now okay, just one negative experience can tip the balance very easily.

Until we stop the negative experiences, it becomes almost impossible to change how the dog feels.

What Can You Do Instead?

Whether your dog panics or is frustrated when you're out, don't let unwanted behavior run unchecked. You're not helping the cause.

If your bored dog thinks he's missing out by staying home, give him something to do. Puzzle feeders are ideal. Generally increasing the enrichment and exercise in your dog's life is a good idea. But while simply increasing exercise might help with boredom, it won't fix panic.

If your dog gets into a panic when you go out, you need to tackle the cause. That means no more scary, long absences.

That seems impossible. If you want to stop your dog's anxiety from getting worse, though, you have to keep your dog below his anxiety threshold. (Learn more about thresholds in Chapter 4.)

If your dog gets into a panic when you go out, you need to tackle the cause. That means no more scary, long absences.

When I started working with my dog's anxiety, I felt like a roaring failure. I couldn't handle the altered reality of never leaving him. But I knew that, every time we left, we poisoned the recovery process and intensified his misery. It wasn't that I didn't know this. I was leaving him *despite* knowing this.

If you're struggling with this, too, why not explore simple goal-setting? Could you leave your dog 20% less often than you currently do and test that for a week? Then, could you shift to 50% less for a week? Small steps might propel you into taking the plunge of no absences if 100% of the time seems impossible.

There are some creative ways to handle not leaving your dog. See if you can give it a try for a week. Remember that whether he's anxious or bored, if you don't nip things in the bud, you risk making things worse.

Once you stop the anxiety from getting worse, you can start training your dog to be happier on his own. The sooner you start training him, the sooner you can help him recover.

Don't Listen to People who Tell You to Leave Him to "Get over It"

In a way, your well-meaning advisors aren't wrong. There is a time and a place for letting your dog bark, pester, or whine it out. For example, if your dog pesters you at the dinner table, ignoring him is your best strategy (as hard as it might be). If you ignore his whimpering, two things happen:

1. Your dog learns pestering doesn't work, and
2. Your dog's pestering isn't reinforced by you rewarding with tidbits.

Anxiety changes the equation. There's way more at stake for your anxious dog. Dogs in a panic don't give up easily.

If you were trying to escape a burning house but were struggling to break down a door, would you give up, say, "This is useless," and just go back to bed? Or would you keep trying, and trying, and trying?

Just like you trying to break down the door in your burning house, panicking dogs don't give up. Their behavior escalates and their stress levels rise. Letting them get on with it makes things worse, not better.

Once all this sinks in, it becomes nearly impossible to leave them. For most owners that means a dramatic shift in their lifestyle, at least while the recovery process is underway.

DEALING WITH THE CHANGE

Having a dog with separation anxiety changes everything. *Lassie Come Home* it isn't, and, while you try your best, this condition will affect your life as a dog owner in many ways.

Following are some of the things I've learned from owning Percy and a few tricks that helped me keep my sanity along the way:

- It pays to plan way ahead for everything.
- Accept that spontaneity might be gone—but not forever.
- You can still go on vacation—but you need to be resourceful.
- You need to get good at ignoring the naysayers.
- Don't be ashamed to use dog anxiety medications.
- See the joy and reward (not just the hardship) of owning a dog with separation anxiety.

It Pays to Plan Way ahead for Everything

Once you've realized that your dog has separation anxiety and is in a panic whenever you go out, it gets tough to leave him. When you know that the root of his behavior is morbid fear, it's even tougher to leave than when you were only worried about him chewing, barking, or soiling.

As you know, separation anxiety is a phobia of being alone. As with any phobia, if you get exposed to too much of whatever scares you, the fear escalates. Leaving your dog for too long means not only that the dog is having a rough time, but the two of you might lose any of the progress you have made through separation anxiety training.

Leaving your dog for too long means not only that the dog is having a rough time, but the two of you might lose any of the progress you have made through separation anxiety training.

At first, the thought of never leaving him is ridiculous. I remember raging, "If I could find a way never to leave him, then the separation anxiety wouldn't be a problem in the first place!"

But despite the fierce resistance, most people do eventually find workarounds to making sure their dog is cared for when they do have to leave.

Getting dog sitters, getting in-laws involved, using online doggy-share websites, even asking the school kids up the street —there's no end to the resourcefulness of an owner trying to do the right thing.

I know first-hand that doing this feels restrictive and headache-inducing—and is far from simple. Like anything new, though, it does get easier once it becomes a habit.

I found the need to plan ahead hugely limiting at first, but you'll be relieved to know that it does become second nature. As you see your dog becoming more settled and less anxious just by

not leaving him—even without doing any training—you become more motivated to keep at it.

Accept that Spontaneity Might Be Gone (but Not Forever)

The freedom to drop everything becomes a hazy memory when you have a dog with separation anxiety. Last-minute outings and separation anxiety don't mix.

You'll get used to writing off any last-minute invitations; anything less than 48 hours' notice becomes an outright *no*. Less than a week might be doable in a pinch.

Yet all is not completely lost. You might be able to bring your dog with you, and you will find creative ways to do so. Here are some tips:

- Think of places with dog-friendly patios. (If you live in Europe, you'll be lucky enough to find a host of restaurants, pubs, and bars that allow dogs.)
- Ask if your dog can come with you if you're going to dinner at a friend's house.
- Arrange to go for dog walk rather than coffee the next time you're getting together with a friend.
- Create a deal with your friends who have kids to trade dog watching for babysitting. These friends know the limitations of last-minute activities as much as you do! If you have kids, bundle dog sitting into the babysitting deal.
- Find movie theaters that have dog-friendly screenings.

Some dogs with separation anxiety are fine with being left in the car. They've learned car absences are shorter and safer. Obviously, you can only use this solution in cooler months.

You Can Still Travel—but You Need to Be Resourceful

Going away when your dog has separation anxiety is anything but straightforward. What are your options?

1. Kenneling
2. House sitters at your house
3. Having someone watch your dog at their home

I've heard many people advocate for kenneling separation anxiety dogs. The argument goes that if the dog does become fearful of being left in the new place, it will associate that fear with the kennels, not the home. "No damage is done" is the argument behind this suggestion.

However, I'm not a fan. Dogs tend to generalize fear. So if you leave your anxious dog in a kennel, chances are high that you'll return to a dog who won't let you out of his sight, who goes into a stress spiral if you so much as think about leaving the house.

Options #2 and #3 are your best bets, but your sitters must understand that they must not leave your dog alone under any circumstances.

I've had great success with option #2. I swear by a site called trustedhousesitters.com (not affiliated, just a fan). This service transformed going away for us.

Get Good at Ignoring the Naysayers

Whether it's friends, family, sitters, or co-workers, everyone has something to say about your dog. Here are some scripts for dealing with noise from the outside world:

"Why can't you leave him? He'll soon quiet down if you let him get on with it."

"Yes, I can see why you would say that, and my trainer says even dog trainers used to think that too, but now we know they're not attention-seeking or getting mad at us for going out: They're having a panic attack."

"It's because you let him onto your sofa and you let him sleep in your bed."

"Lots of people do say these things cause separation anxiety. But no one knows for certain what brings it on. We do know how to fix it though, and that's what I'm focused on."

"Surely you can leave him this once. It's only a movie/lunch/drink."

"I know it can seem silly that I can't leave him, but if I let him go over his fear threshold, he'll panic and have a setback. I risk losing all the progress we've made so far. If I stick to the plan, I'll be back in circulation soon enough."

"He doesn't still have separation anxiety, does he?"

"It probably seems like I've been working on this for ages, but what you might not know is that a dog with separation anxiety has seriously messed-up brain chemistry. It's a deep emotional trauma on the same level as human PTSD, so can you see why it's not something that can be quickly fixed?"

***

Remember that your friends and family mean well. They just haven't been through what we have, so it's harder for them to make sense of what's going on.

Don't Be Ashamed to Use Dog Anxiety Medications

The gold standard treatment for separation anxiety is systematic desensitization combined with anxiety medications. Chapter 6 explains in more detail how this works.

Desensitization alone is a highly successful treatment. However, progress is frequently more rapid when you give your dog's brain chemistry a nudge.

As far as we know, the panic that separation anxiety dogs go through changes their neurochemistry. Many dogs need the help that anxiety medications offer.

Yet for many people, putting their dog on medication is unthinkable.

If you're reluctant, know that I've been in your shoes. I was a cynic. My vet managed to persuade me to dip my toe in the water by starting out with alternative remedies, none of which

made a bit of difference, incidentally. The only impacts were the dent in my bank account and time lost while we waited to see another remedy fail.

We then progressed to anxiety medications, and the difference was quite astonishing. I was left wishing I'd done it sooner.

Medications don't work for every dog—and they don't work unless accompanied by training.

Whatever your view on anxiety medications, don't you owe it to your dog to help improve things for him as quickly as you can? He doesn't have a say, but if he did, he'd be asking you to do whatever you can to make this fear go away.

(Read more about medications in Chapter 6.)

See the Joy and Reward (Not Just the Hardship) of Owning a Dog with Separation Anxiety

Working with your dog, seeing him recover from separation anxiety, and getting your life back on track in the process might be among the most rewarding things you'll ever do.

Am I mad? If you've just recently discovered your dog has separation anxiety and are in the depths of despair, then I probably do seem a little insane. But please hang in there. I can see the light at the end of your tunnel (even if you can't).

Separation anxiety is one of the most treatable problem behaviors in dogs. And the love of a dog with separation anxiety is quite something.

WHAT IF IT'S ALL TOO MUCH?

For many of us, though, separation anxiety tests the bond with our dogs.

We know that it's not their fault they're like this, but we're worn down by feeling like prisoners in our own homes or by the constant complaints from the neighbors. We love them more than the world, but we get pushed to breaking point and our relationship with our dog suffers.

Not Like the Movies

Dogs, just like us, aren't perfect, but we have a long history of idealizing our canine companions. From Lassie to Benji, from Marley to Beethoven, we love a good dog movie.

These canine stars are far removed from the dogs on our leashes, though. Like their human celebrity counterparts, these doggie screen sirens are not all they seem. They may not have an army of stylists and makeup artists, but great editing, multiple takes, a team of handlers, and a troop of stand-ins ensure that the dogs we see on screen are near-perfect.

No wonder we look at our own dog and see flaws.

The Dog Next Door

It's not just fictional dogs who appear flawless. Closer to home, everyone else's dogs can seem so well-behaved that you feel like you're the only one with the problem dog.

Don't forget, though, that you don't always see the whole picture. You might see a dog who's superb off-leash at the park, but who is awful on-leash. Or you might see a dog who politely greets people in the street, but bowls over people when they come into the house.

Of course, some dogs are easier than others. The dog who doesn't do anything his owners dislike is a rare beast. Dog ownership in the real world is nothing like it appears in movies.

What We Expect of Dogs

The high expectations we have of dog ownership can lead us to feel cursed when we discover it's our dog who has separation anxiety. It's easy to think, *Why me*?

Dogs with separation anxiety don't stack up to the ideal. They often frustrate the heck out of us. We can't understand why they get so upset. After all, we're only going to the store/dinner/the gym/work. We always come back. So why do they freak out so?

When they do get upset, why do they need to bark incessantly, or pee in the house, or chew our favorite shoes, or try to eat their crate? It's so maddening, isn't it? If you've ever had these thoughts, you are not alone. We all have! It's normal.

Luckily, separation anxiety training not only helps your dog over his debilitating condition, it can also remind you of the wonderful side of your dog. In Chapter 4 we dive into the details of training, but here's a preview of why separation

anxiety training does more than just help your dog feel better about being alone:

- It's training you do together. It's time you set aside, several times a week, to work with him. No distractions—just you and him.
- We place a huge emphasis on enrichment with separation anxiety training. That means doing more fun, playful stuff with your dog.
- When you commit to not leaving him, you commit to keeping him below his threshold. If he's not anxious, his repertoire of anxiety-related problem behavior will stop. The single step of halting the problem behavior will work wonders for your connection with your dog.
- Dogs with separation anxiety are often beautifully behaved in other respects, but when you're knee deep in worry about his condition, it can be easy to forget this. Training helps you to see the best side to him in glorious technicolor.

I'm not going to sugar-coat what it is to own a dog with separation anxiety. You wouldn't be normal if you didn't, at least some of the time, feel at your wit's end, so in the next chapter we look at some of the life hacks that might help this all be a little bit more manageable.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- The challenge of separation anxiety extends way beyond having a dog you can't leave.
- Do your best to ignore others' judgment. You know way more about your dog's condition than your friends or family do.
- You don't have to put your life on hold. You just need to be creative in finding ways to not leave your dog alone.
- Treating your dog's separation anxiety might be a difficult journey, but it will be rewarding.

CHAPTER THREE

ESSENTIAL LIFE HACKS FOR SEPARATION ANXIETY OWNERS

In the previous chapter, we explored the severe impact that having a dog with separation anxiety can have on our lives. Let's now look at how we can take a seemingly impossible situation and make it manageable.

In particular we'll look at:

- Handling friends and family,
- Dealing with neighbors,
- Coping with life changes,
- Going on vacation,

- Traveling with your dog,
- Vet and groomer visits, and
- Dogs and cars.

HANDLING FRIENDS AND FAMILY

Ask anyone who owns a dog with separation anxiety, and they'll tell you their friends and family are baffled by the whole thing. They either don't understand what separation anxiety is, or they don't know why you're tackling it the way you are.

For the most part, those closest to us mean well. They want to empathize and to help, but they struggle to stand in our shoes.

Friends and family tend to fall into three broad categories:

- Very supportive of you, your dog, and his condition
- Desperately trying to empathize but struggling—and often running out of empathy and patience when your dog doesn't look like he's recovering
- Not getting it at all: clueless on what the heck you're doing and thinking you're a bit mad

Not everyone is dismissive or lacking empathy. Many are supportive of your dog and his condition. And others who are less supportive often lack the right information.

But when the naysayers grind you down, is there anything you can do? Here are my two main approaches: duck it or tackle it.

Duck It

This is my favorite! Over the years, I've become dispirited trying to convince others I was doing the right thing for my dog or for clients' dogs. It always felt like pushing water uphill.

As you've no doubt experienced, it's so hard to convince people to change their minds about anything.

We're often confident we can do so with persuasive, reasoned argument.

But, to get people to change their mind and agree with us, we have to get them to say they were wrong. And none of us finds it easy to admit we're wrong! Our brains are funny things, and studies show evidence rarely changes minds.

Thus I gave up trying to win the argument on separation anxiety. It's better to acknowledge the comment and find a way to bridge to another topic.

Tackle It

When friends or family make unhelpful comments, you might decide not to duck but to debate. If that's your preferred tactic, here are some responses you might find helpful:

COMMENT

"Leave him. He'll learn/get over it."

RESPONSE

"You're right. We used to think letting them bark it out was the best way to tackle separation anxiety.

In the past, when a dog was acting up when they were alone, we assumed they were being bad. Or they were mad at us for going out.

But now, we know that dogs with separation anxiety have a panic disorder. They have a phobia of being alone. They're not acting up. They're in a blind panic.

Leaving them to panic doesn't make things better. It makes things worse. That's why I don't leave him to get on with it."

COMMENT

"You created this. It's your fault/you spoil him!"

RESPONSE

"I know it can seem like what an owner does causes separation anxiety or make it worse. But that's not what the experts say. You can take two dogs and treat them in the same way, but one will get separation anxiety and the other won't.

And letting him sleep on the bed or come onto the sofa isn't the problem. Lots of dogs who aren't allowed on beds still get separation anxiety.

Experts do agree, though, that it's easy to make the condition worse by letting a dog cry it out or punishing them for what they get up to when you're out.

Luckily, I know these things don't do any good. That's why I'm using this training method. It's the one thing proven to make a difference to separation anxiety."

COMMENT

"Oh, he still has that! Why isn't he over it yet?"

RESPONSE

"Separation anxiety training isn't like training to sit. My dog has a had a severe emotional trauma. Some experts think that his brain chemistry has changed.

Like us getting over deep upset, it doesn't happen overnight. He currently thinks that being alone is the scariest thing. He's not going to learn fast that being alone is safe. It takes as long as it takes."

COMMENT

"Shouldn't you put him to sleep?"

RESPONSE

"The humane thing to do isn't to put him to sleep. It's to help him get over his fear.

It's very rewarding to see him getting happier every day. And I'll keep going until he's completely over it. He didn't ask to live with me, so he deserves a chance. I can be as patient as he needs me to be."

DEALING WITH NEIGHBORS

One of the biggest tests we ever face when our dog has separation anxiety is neighbor complaints.

Picture this: You can hear your dog barking as you pull into the driveway. It's been a long day, and you don't need this. It gets worse. Your neighbor has slipped the dreaded handwritten note under the door.

You knew your dog whined for a while, but you hoped he then curled up on his bed and snoozed away. But you read the note and discover that was wishful thinking. He barked all day.

Finding out from a neighbor that your dog barks incessantly is a common scenario. Sometimes it's a note under the door. Sometimes it's an email. It's rarely a face-to-face conversation over the fence.

If you've received one of those notes, or are worried you're only one bark away from one, you need to act. Here are some ways to get ahead of things and remain on good terms with your neighbors:

- Empathize, agree, and take it on the chin.
- Determine whether it's separation anxiety or another behavior problem.
- Once you've eaten humble pie, get on their good side.
- Don't punish your dog.

Empathize, Agree, and Take it on the Chin

Having a dog that barks all day—especially one that angers your neighbors—is rotten. It's not your fault and it's not your dog's fault. You and I know that, but your neighbors don't see it that way. They're angry with you and your dog for barking all day while they tried to work from home.

Here's where a simple apology, a lot of empathy, and a bit of groveling can go a long way. Try saying something like this:

"Yes, I know it can seem like my dog's being bad, and I can imagine how frustrated you are. He has separation anxiety, which means he's not barking to be naughty. He's in a panic at being left. I find it very upsetting and didn't realize the size of the problem until you told me about him barking all day. I'm so glad you did."

Determine whether It's Separation Anxiety or Another Behavior Problem

If your dog barks when you're out, that doesn't mean he has separation anxiety. You need to rule out:

- Boredom.
- Window barking (people, dogs, squirrels, whatever!).
- Alarm barking. (What's going on in the street? Deliveries? Mail? Construction?)
- Thunder/noise phobia.

Separation anxiety training doesn't apply to these conditions. Some of these problems are easier to resolve than separation anxiety.

Once You've Eaten Humble Pie, Get on Their Good Side

Empathize with them. Tell your neighbors you understand your dog's barking is unacceptable. Say you see a problem too. Explain you're not ignoring the problem—far from it. Your dog has a panic disorder, but you're on the case. You're training to get him to be more comfortable on his own.

If they ask how long it's going to take, be honest: You don't know—but as part of the training you will reduce the amount of time your dog is on his own. Meanwhile, promise to keep your dog as quiet as possible.

Remember: If your dog has separation anxiety, then his barking is an emotional behavior. There is only one way to keep your dog from barking: get him comfortable being alone (or get him company).

Don't Punish Your Dog

If reaching for a shock collar seems tempting, don't. These collars work by frightening your dog into stopping his behavior. They don't change his emotion.

If the barking stops, it's not because he feels better about things. He stops barking because he's avoiding the pain of the

shock. If you use shock to stop howling, you're treating fear with fear. That doesn't make much sense, does it?

Don't let citronella bark collars fool you, either. They work because dogs find the scent of lemons disgusting. The training is still aversive, but in a different way. If you use pain or fear to train your dog, you run the risk of your dog developing an even greater fear of being alone.

Don't be drawn in by the short-term fix aversives seem to offer. You're not solving the problem.

Nothing like a Stitch in Time

With neighbors, nothing tops getting on their good side before the problem develops. As an example, think back to when you've thrown a party. You invited the neighbors and maybe gave them a gift. You put goodwill in the bank. Think about using a similar tactic if you suspect your dog's barking will be a problem. You could take them flowers, chocolates, or wine, or buy them a gift card. You could offer to help with chores or run an errand for them. Do whatever it takes!

It can take a village to fix separation anxiety. Having your neighbors' support, rather than their opposition, is priceless. Who knows? Your neighbors might even become part of your village.

COPING WITH LIFE CHANGES

Dogs and change don't always mix. Although many dogs breeze through change, anxious dogs can be thrown by it.

Regularity can help anxious dogs become comfortable with whatever might be stressing them out, especially if the worry is only mild. But switch the routine—change even one thing—and suddenly all bets are off.

Anxious dogs are continually working out "Is it safe or is it dangerous?" Context is especially important for your dog to understand whether something is safe or dangerous.

Dogs are notoriously bad at generalizing confidence but seem to generalize fear all too easily. Hence, they may learn to be okay in one context, but when one thing changes, fear can return.

This can be especially challenging when working with a dog with separation anxiety. As some research studies have shown, an adjustment to routine or change in household circumstances can exacerbate home-alone distress.

Non-anxious dogs get muddled by context changes too, though. The best example of this is when your dog, who sits beautifully at home, falls apart when you're at the park. You think it's the same: Sitting is sitting, right? For your dog, it's a whole other thing.

Renowned trainer Karen Pryor coined the phrase *new tank syndrome* when she was training aquatic mammals. Behavior

would be solid in one tank, but when the animal was moved to a new tank, the training fell apart.

You might have experienced this too. If you have anxiety about public speaking, doing the same presentation over and over might help your nerves. But, if you had to present new material—or material to new people, or in a new location—your anxiety might return.

Dogs are notoriously bad at generating confidence but seem to generate fear all too easily.

Of course, just because your anxious dog might get more upset by household changes, new school routines, your getting a new job, or your moving, that doesn't mean that you shouldn't do these things. (I do know owners who have factored their dog into big life decisions like these, though!)

You might not be able to prepare your dog for the changes, but awareness that your dog might be affected should help you. At least you'll be ready for whatever meltdown there might be. He might even surprise you and take the change in stride. I've seen that happen more than once.

GOING ON VACATION

When you have a dog with separation anxiety, vacations can be tricky. Some people even put off trips because they feel as though they have no options.

However, with a little bit of creativity and outside-the-box thinking, you can find a solution that will put your mind at ease.

Here are my top tips for overcoming the absence hurdle when your dog has separation anxiety:

- Find a dog sitter.
- Ask a friend or family member if your dog can stay with them.
- Kennel your dog.
- Take your dog with you.

Find a Dog Sitter

There's no place like home, for humans and dogs alike. When leaving your dog for extended periods of time, it's a good idea to keep as many variables the same as you can. He'll have an easier time adjusting to your absence in the comforts of his home. His routine and surroundings can remain consistent if he remains in your home.

The logistics are easier for you, too: You won't need to shuttle your dog (and his food, toys, and bed) to another location.

Finding a dog sitter you (and your dog) can trust is not without its challenges. Just as with child babysitters, it can be difficult to find someone who is available, trustworthy, and within budget. It is even harder to find a sitter who understands the unique needs of an anxious dog.

Services that offer sitters, ranging from free to paid, are available. Sitters usually come with references and police checks.

Free dog sitters are usually travelers looking for accommodation in exchange for caring for you your pet.

Trustedhousesitters.com is an excellent place to find free sitters. Also look at paid services like Rover.com, which provide pricing, user reviews, and sitter profiles.

If you choose this route, have the dog sitter agree to not leave your dog for longer than he can handle. I say to clients, "Look your sitter in the eye and get them to promise they won't leave your dog." Do so at the interview stage and see what they say.

Ask a Friend or Family Member if Your Dog Can Stay with Them

Having friends or family care for your dog while you're on vacation is another option. They've already met him and understand that he has separation anxiety.

Also, this is usually a free (or very cheap) alternative to hiring a dog sitter. Usually, offering to house sit or babysit for them, or another type of trade, is all that's required if they are a close connection.

Unfortunately, not everyone understands the significance of what they've signed up for: never leaving your dog alone while you're away. Can their schedule allow for this type of commitment?

This scenario also presents another challenge: Well-meaning friends and family might take his separation anxiety training into their own hands. While they're only trying to help, they may undo the hard work you've already put in.

It's important to have an honest conversation. The dog sitter needs to truly understand what's involved. They may think they know, but the structure your dog needs is for your dog's well-being.

Kennel Your Dog

As mentioned previously, I'm not a fan of boarding kennels—not because they're bad or that there aren't some good ones. Many dogs find kennels stressful (even dogs who don't have separation anxiety).

Boarding kennels can be a fun and entertaining experience for dogs who are social. At least they aren't going to be left at home (something that could happen if you get a sitter). You might get lucky and find you're able to "protect" the integrity of the home setting. If so, you'll ensure all of your training effort in this space isn't undone by a separation meltdown while you're away.

There is a big risk, though: Some dogs with separation anxiety find being in a kennel so stressful that a training regression is inevitable when you get back.

That said, sometimes your only option is a kennel. If you find yourself in this situation, use one that also has a daycare so your dog will have constant company during the day. Explain your dog's separation anxiety to the staff so they can adjust their approach for his needs.

Take Your Dog with You

This is, obviously, not ideal if you're hitting the beaches of the Mediterranean or hiking in the Himalayas. However, for closer-to-home vacations that don't involve plane travel, it could be an option. Many hotels and vacation rentals allow pets. See the following section for more specifics on traveling with your dog.

This is a great solution for managing your dog's well-being while you're on vacation. But be sure you can enjoy your trip if you're traveling with a dog who can't be left.

***

Hopefully, these ideas have helped make your next getaway a bit more feasible. Remember that a break can be good for you. You'll come back feeling more refreshed and ready to continue powering through separation anxiety training.

TRAVELING WITH YOUR DOG

Taking your dog with you when you go away seems like an inspired idea. But can you be sure you'll enjoy your trip if you're traveling with a dog who can't be left? What do you do when you want to go sightseeing or out for a meal?

You won't be able to leave your dog in a strange hotel or rental home. As noted previously, when dogs get over fear, they don't generalize their newfound confidence in every scenario. They cope in one context at a time, but the fear can return if you switch things up.

Even if you've worked your way through training and your dog is now comfortable being alone in your home, he will almost certainly fall apart in a new location like a hotel.

If you want your dog to chill alone in a hotel room or a relative's home, he must learn the drill in the new place. That means taking separation anxiety training on the road and teaching your dog to be home alone in the new context.

Meanwhile, there are a few things that can make new places less scary for anxious dogs:

- **Make it routine.** Repetition is a big plus. Staying with the same relatives or friends increases your dog's comfort level.

- **Make it familiar.** Returning to the same hotel may not be practical. Instead, take your dog's bed, crate, or blankets. All dogs will feel better staying in a place that has their belongings.

- **Don't crate in a strange place.** A hotel stay is not the time to discover your dog doesn't like being in a crate, so know before you go. Many anxious dogs fear crates, so getting him to love his crate might take effort.

- **Call ahead for a dog sitter.** Arrange a dog sitter to come to your hotel or vacation rental. You'd do it traveling with your kids, wouldn't you? The number of accommodations providing lists of pet sitters might surprise you. These sitters get busy, though, so book ahead of time.

- **Try the car.** If you're lucky, your dog might tolerate staying on his own in the car. Again, try this before you go away. And of course, don't leave him in the car during hotter months.

When you travel don't freak out if your dog gets upset in a strange place. It's to be expected. Most dogs with separation anxiety will not handle the change. But remember: All that's happened is you've switched the context.

Expect him not to be okay. Then, anything else is a bonus.

VET AND GROOMER VISITS

While my dog is long recovered from his separation anxiety, I'm always wary of situations that might cause regressions. Vet visits—especially those involving treatment—can be scary for any animal, let alone a dog with separation anxiety.

When you have a dog with separation anxiety, you realize that simple things (like a vet visit) can get complicated. There are ways to alleviate some of the stress. First, let's step back and understand the challenge.

Why Do Dogs with Separation Anxiety Struggle at the Vet?

Dogs with separation anxiety fear two things the most: being alone and being crated. Vet visits create a perfect storm of both. Dogs are occasionally left alone as they wait for treatment, have tests, or recover from treatments, and it's common to crate them as they wake up from sedatives or anesthetic.

Dogs who have separation anxiety often get worse when they've had fear-inducing, over-threshold experiences. I've seen lots of dogs return from vet visits with significant regression.

What Can You Do to Make Vet Visits Less Stressful?

Vet visits are unavoidable, so what can you do to make them less stressful for your dog? Here are a few ideas:

- Talk to your vet.
- Break treatment and recuperation into steps.
- Ask about anxiety medications for your dog's visits.
- Clarify whether your dog will be alone at any point.
- See if your vet can avoid using a crate.
- Ask your vet how quickly you can take your dog home.

Talk to Your Vet

Letting your vet know about your dog's separation anxiety is key. Not only can they help provide excellent advice about how to treat separation anxiety, they can also work with their team to limit the amount of isolation and crating your dog experiences during any given visit.

Break Treatment and Recuperation into Steps

One of the main reasons your dog will be isolated is that blood tests, samples, X-rays, and so forth can be done more efficiently

if veterinary staff can take the dog and perform those procedures according to their schedule. This may mean a great deal of waiting solo for your dog.

If the treatment is elective/non-urgent, ask your veterinary clinic if the procedures can be split into smaller, one-off appointments. Another option is to see if the clinic can condense procedures into a shorter window and do them all together while you wait in the reception area, ready to take your dog home as soon as possible.

Ask about Anxiety Medications for Your Dog's Visits

Giving your dog a short-acting anxiety medication may help alleviate some of his panic, leading to a smoother vet visit. The sedatives your vet will give you for home use are typically given orally. The dose can be timed in advance of the appointment. (These same types of medications are often prescribed to people who have a fear of flying or a fear of the dentist.)

For surgery itself, ask your vet to sedate your dog before anesthesia. Ask if you can stay with him while he's being sedated. Once he's more settled, you can leave him in the capable hands of the vet and vet techs.

Clarify whether Your Dog Will Be Left Alone at Any Point

Your dog is most likely to panic when he's left alone without sedation, and not under full anesthesia. Clarify whether he'll be left alone at any point and ask if someone could be around for those times. Even a vet tech writing cases notes nearby would help.

See if Your Vet Can Avoid Using a Crate

Crating is often used for safety purposes, when your groggy dog wakes from sedation or anesthetic. Depending on the procedure, your vet may be open to keeping him out of the crate, so it's worth asking.

Ask Your Vet How Quickly You Can Take Him Home

Some vets will prioritize discharging an anxious patient. They'll let you take him home as soon as it's safe to do so, rather than waiting until the end of the practice day.

What if It's an Emergency?

Of course, if it's an emergency, most of these practices are not possible. In all cases, the emergency must take precedence over your dog's anxiety, but you can still inquire about recovery and timing to help with the transition post-emergency.

Physical and Mental Health: Not "Either/Or"

A growing number of vets are beginning to understand the impact of a fear-filled vet visit. These vets are committed to doing what they can to make your dog's visit more bearable.

Remember: Your dog's physical health is vital to his mental well-being. While his anxiety does matter, don't let it prevent you from booking those much-needed vet appointments!

At the Groomer

As with vet visits, the challenge for dogs with separation anxiety at the groomer is that they may need to be crated. There might also be times when the groomer steps out and the dogs don't have a human in the room with them.

Explain to your groomer that your dog can't be alone in any circumstances. Ask them not to your dog and ask that they try to manage things so that he has someone in the room with him at all times.

DOGS AND CARS

Lots of dogs struggling alone at home seem okay with being left in the car. This was the case with my dog Percy. He freaked if we so much as hinted at leaving the house. Put him in the car, though, and he blissed out.

We couldn't leave him long, and we could only do it when the weather was right—not too hot and not too cold. But at least we had another option for managing absences.

We don't know exactly why some dogs handle being alone in the car. And perhaps the reasons are different for each dog.

But here are some thoughts on what's possibly behind it:

- Short absences.
- They can see you come and go.
- None of the above!

Short Absences

When you first leave your dog in the car, do lots of very short absences (pop into the store, bank, etc.).

And especially follow this pattern of short absences when they're young. We're so petrified of them peeing in the car we tend to rush in and out of wherever we need to go.

Can you see what's happening? Lots of short, safe absences. That's exactly what we prescribe for separation anxiety. Unwittingly we've gotten our dog used to being alone in the car. We used the very same method we use for separation anxiety training.

They Can See You Come and Go

Maybe this is important to some dogs. They might feel better seeing their owner, or they've associated seeing their owner with safe absences. Interestingly, with separation anxiety training exercises, seeing the owner through a window can make things harder for some dogs (though better for others).

None of the Above!

Sometimes, with dogs, the best answer is that nobody knows. Since we can't ask them, we often don't know why they do what they do. As frustrating as it is, we have to accept that.

If your dog is okay in the car, you might never know why.

But why isn't always important. What *is* important is he's shown you he's okay on his own. That also means we can teach him he's okay on his own in the house.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Separation anxiety affects your dog in more ways than just when you leave the house.
- You're going to do things differently when you go on vacation, to the vet, and pretty much anywhere.
- Though it might seem like hard work, protecting your dog in all these scenarios pays off.

CHAPTER FOUR

LET'S GET TRAINING

So, how do we train separation anxiety? Remember that separation anxiety is a panic disorder. It's a phobia. It's a phobia just like the phobias that people get. Maybe you're afraid of heights or you don't like spiders. For a dog with separation anxiety, the phobia is the fear of being alone. We train separation anxiety—the way that we get the dog over it—by using the same therapy used to treat human phobias: gradual exposure to the thing that causes the panic.

WHAT SEPARATION ANXIETY *ISN'T*

One of the reasons that many of the remedies you might have tried before fail is that they focus on stopping problem behaviors. Examples include a shock collar for barking and an indestructible crate for chewing and soiling.

These don't work (apart from the fact that they make the dog more petrified) because they try to fix the symptoms of panic. They do nothing to address the panic itself, except perhaps to make it worse. As noted previously, the behaviors that panicking displays come from emotion. And the only way to stop panic-based behaviors is to address the underlying fear.

Gradual Exposure to the Scary Thing

Let's get back to what *does* work. When we gradually get over a fear, we are using a process that in dog training we call desensitization.

Whenever we want to get a dog more comfortable with something he's scared of—be that strangers, nail trimming, or noises—we take a tiny dose of the thing that scares the dog, but at a low, non-frightening intensity, and then gradually increase the intensity at a pace the dog is happy with.

Take nail trimming, for example. We might start by just showing the nail clippers to the dog. Then when the dog seems fine with that, and shows no fear, we might bring the clipper toward the nail. Then we might touch the dog's nail, and so on.

With separation anxiety training, we expose your dog to the amount of alone time that he can cope with at any one time. We gradually increase that alone time as the dog learns that being on his own for that amount of time is safe. And we keep adding time to that duration—as long as the dog is comfortable.

The key is that the intensity of each step must never be too much for the dog. Your dog needs to feel at every step that he's okay and there's nothing to be frightened of.

It's vital not to rush the training. We go at the dog's pace. We let him tell us what he's comfortable with and how much more he could do. We never let him go over what we call his anxiety threshold (the point at which the dog crosses over from coping to freaking out in panic at being left alone).

If the dog does go over his anxiety threshold, then he will not feel safe. We are not reprogramming him to think that being on his own is fine.

That's separation anxiety training in a nutshell.

Management and Medication

In addition to training, two other components are critical to separation anxiety treatment: management and medication.

Management is vitally important for all behavior modification training with dogs. When you commit to helping a dog with fear, it's crucial that you say to him, "On my watch, you will no longer have to deal with that thing that petrifies you."

With separation anxiety training, management means no longer exposing the dog to scary alone time.

Another critical part of getting a dog over separation anxiety is using anxiety medication. Anxiety medication for most dogs makes a big difference to their recovery. For this reason, you should talk to your vet as soon as you suspect your dog has separation anxiety.

We talk more about both management and medications in Chapter 6. For now, let's look at training, step-by-step.

STEP 1: ASSESS WHAT YOUR DOG CAN DO NOW

Often, when we approach any kind of dog training, we focus on where we want our dog to end up. We have a goal in mind, whether that's teaching the dog to sit or to come away from squirrels at the park or to be able to be left on his own for four hours. We might be clear about what we want from training, but so often we miss this question: What can our dog do now?

We must know where we're starting so we can be clear about the path. So the very first thing we do in separation anxiety training is work out what your dog can comfortably cope with right now.

Another common mistake is to guess, or estimate, a starting point.

You might say, "Yeah, he's usually fine for five minutes, *I think*" or "He's okay for 30 minutes, *I think*."

Desensitization training is a very precise process. It requires precise information about your dog's ability to cope on his own.

It's not good enough to say you think it might be five minutes or 30 minutes. We need to know with pinpoint accuracy.

We get this data by doing a baseline assessment.

When working with clients, first we set up an initial video session. I look at the dog, see what's happening in terms of the dog's anxiety, and answer the question "What can your dog do now?"

When you do this, you need to do some detective work: leave your dog alone and record your dog's behavior on video.

Using Video for Your Baseline Assessment

Video is a game-changer for treating separation anxiety. It allows us to assess and monitor the condition in a way that we could never have done in the past. We need to know how he's doing when he's home alone during that training. Without video, how do we do that?

In the past, we might try to sneak a peek through the curtains. With video, we can see in real time exactly how your dog is doing. This takes away the guesswork.

Setting Up a Camera

You have many camera options to use for the assessment and to monitor your dog when you're out. Think about this in terms of baby monitor–type or home surveillance–type technology.

First, you can set up video-to-video calls. In that case, you would set up, say, two Skype accounts, or use your Facebook account and your partner's Facebook account, and set up a video

between those two accounts, using smartphones, a laptop, or a tablet. One of the device cameras will focus on your dog and the other device will be your monitor.

Second, you can turn old smartphones and tablets into cameras. This is where apps like Alfred and Presence can be extremely helpful.

Third, you can buy a specific piece of technology, such as a webcam or a surveillance cam (such as Nest). This is a more expensive approach, so you might want to try one of the other two options first.

The great advantage of the third option is you have a device that's set up to go all of the time, so you don't have to worry about being ready to go. The price of these dedicated cameras has reduced significantly, so they are definitely worth considering. (My favorite dedicated camera is Wyzecam.)

Carry Out the Baseline Assessment

With a camera in place, you are ready to conduct the baseline assessment. Here are the steps:

1. Go out the door.

2. Stand on the other side of the door with a picture of your dog on your screen.

3. Monitor your dog to see how long it takes until he gets anxious. Don't let the exercise go for any longer than that. You only need to determine the amount of time that's passed when he starts to get anxious. You don't need to leave him barking, or whining, or crying, or chewing, or destroying.

Lots of people worry when they do the baseline assessment that they're going to come back to a terrible surprise like their dog having soiled the carpet or chewed the door.

However, you only step outside for as long as it takes your dog to start to get anxious, then you come straight back in. You don't leave your dog long enough to damage or make a mess.

You're looking for that first bark, whine, paw at the door, or whatever your dog does when he first starts to stress.

Record the Assessment Time

Whatever time you write down is your baseline assessment.

Usually the time that you record in that first proper baseline assessment is significantly less than you expected. You may have noted seconds, or it may have been minutes, but it probably wasn't as long as you were expecting.

If You Can't Even Get Out the Door

If you can't even get out of the door without your dog freaking out, you need to take a different approach at first.

Your dog might have figured out when you're going to leave even before you're near the door.

For example, your dog might have worked out when you pick up your keys, put on your shoes, and pick up a bag, that you're going to leave. These are called pre-departure cues. Your dog might even pick up on things like brushing teeth or showering. Any part of your routine can be a cue for your dog that you're about to leave the house.

How Do Dogs Know What These Cues Mean?

Dogs are brilliant at making connections. They constantly scan their environment to find tip-offs to what predicts what. They look for associations and connect the dots. Dogs are prediction-making machines.

A perfect example of a tip-off is a leash. That piece of leather with a clip on the end doesn't mean anything to a dog. Dogs aren't born into the world thinking that leashes are amazing.

What happens is dogs start to associate leashes with going out, and going out is fun. So, when you pick up the leash, the dog knows something good is about to happen.

You could try an experiment to show how meaningless the leash could be. Pick up the leash repeatedly. Each time you pick up the leash, you might notice that your dog gets less and less and less excited.

If you did that a dozen or maybe 20 times in a row, eventually most dogs will go, "Oh, okay. I used to think that leash meant going out. But she picks it up, and we don't go out. So now I'm not so sure."

You've just started to change the association that leash equals fun. (Note that some dogs will get too amped up if you try this. If this is your dog, don't try it.)

A pre-departure cue is just like the leash. The cue itself means nothing to the dog. It's the association that matters. With pre-departure cues, the association is that something terrible is about to happen.

Cueing Anxiety

The big problem with pre-departure cues is, of course, that dogs with separation anxiety will get anxious even before you go out the door. If your dog freaks out as soon as you pick up keys, then you won't be able to do gradual exposure exercises without him getting extremely upset.

This is why sometimes we have to separate our departure cues from our departure exercises. Otherwise, we can't keep our dog below threshold.

If this is your dog, here are some tips for handling pre-departure cues:

- Audit pre-departure cues.
- Prioritize.
- Build cues into your practice departures.
- Change the association.

Audit Pre-Departure Cues

First, do an audit. Make a note of what you do as you get ready to leave the house. From this list, highlight anything that makes your dog upset or anxious, and that your dog pays attention to—the things your dog uses as tip-offs to you leaving.

You can find a fillable sample worksheet at www.berightbackthebook.com. List your cues in column one of the worksheet.

Prioritize

Go through your list and ask, "If I were doing a practice departure, which of these pre-departure cues are absolutely unavoidable?"

Let me give you an example. If you live in Canada, it's January, your boots are by the door, and there are three feet of snow outside the door, then your boots are essential.

There's nothing you can do unless you are brave enough to step outside in your socks. List anything like this—anything that's essential to you getting out the door—in column two.

Next ask yourself, "What do I *not* absolutely, desperately have to do?" Maybe you don't have to put on a hat, or perhaps you don't have to pick up a bag—at least not when you do the practice departure.

Obviously, in real life, you'll need to do these things, and we come back to why we can avoid them just for now (in the next section).

Separate cues into avoidable and unavoidable.

Build Cues into Your Practice Departures

Next, start to incorporate those unavoidable cues into short departure practices. Leave out the avoidable ones for now. Here's why.

The reason your dog finds, say, your putting on the alarm scary is because your setting the alarm says, "Scary outcome coming up."

If we can make your dog think your leaving isn't scary, there's a chance he'll no longer worry about the alarm. Why? The alarm-setting now predicts something that doesn't upset him.

As you work on getting your dog more comfortable being home alone, you sometimes get lucky the old cues no longer stress him out (or don't stress him out as much).

Change the Association

If you have unavoidable cues that panic your dog, you will need to do work on these. Essentially, you're going to change the association.

Remember the exercise of picking up the leash earlier in this section, in which we were teaching your dog that the leash was no longer a cue to going out? We were changing the association between leash and fun. We made the leash meaningless.

We're going to do the same with those unavoidable cues that make your dog anxious. Keys don't make dogs anxious. What makes dogs anxious is that keys predict your leaving. We want to make keys, and all other pre-departure cues, meaningless. We need to desensitize your dog to these just as we would desensitize to absences.

Review your list. Look at the column with the unavoidable cues. Throughout the day, pick up those objects, or put on the shoes, or put on that jacket repeatedly.

You'll see that your dog starts to react less to what you're doing. It's almost as if they are saying, "Oh, when she puts her boots on, she doesn't go out, so boots don't always mean going out."

You'll have to do this exercise repeatedly until you get to the point when, when you put on the boots, the dog's reaction is "Oh, that means nothing."

A word of caution about this exercise: A pre-departure cue might send some dogs over their anxiety-threshold. A lot of the advice you see on the internet about handling pre-departure cues gets it wrong. If picking up keys sends your dog into a panic, picking up keys repeatedly will not desensitize your dog.

It will actually do the opposite. Your dog will sensitize (that is, become more afraid). Rarely are owners given this information. I worry about owners who blithely work on pre-departure cues that are actually sending their dog into a frenzy.

Instead of acting in an "all or nothing" manner, you need to reduce the intensity of the cue that makes him panic. (I did mention that separation anxiety training was all about precision!)

I worked with a client, Ane, whose dog Daisy, couldn't handle the car being driven away. (Remember: Pre-departure cues can be things that happen after you close the door, not just what happens in the house.)

Rather than just trying to desensitize Daisy to Ane driving away, we had to take things more gradually.

1. Keep car keys in pocket all day (avoidable cue).
2. Walk toward car. (The driveway was gravel so Daisy knew when the gravel crunched that her owner was heading for the car.)
3. Unlock car.

4. Open and quickly close car door (very gently).
5. Open and quickly close car door (more naturally now).
6. Open car door, leave open for 5 seconds, then close.
7. Open car door, get in, close door, sit in car for 10 seconds.
8. Open car door, get in but don't close door, turn on engine, leave for 5 seconds, then turn off.
9. Open car door, get in, close door, turn on engine, leave for 5 seconds, then turn off.
10. Open car door, get in, close door, turn on engine, drive for 30 feet, and return. (This one was big, but we had to do it at some point!)
11. Open car door, get in, close door, turn on engine, drive for 50 feet, and return.

I won't bore you with the rest of the plan. The dog could hear the car a good 1,000 feet away, and we kept slowly building up to that distance.

When Cues Might Actually Help

The assumption is that pre-departure cues are bad. As described above, they are bad because they trigger your dog into thinking they are going to be left for longer than they can cope with.

However, don't get hung up on the idea that cues are bad.

When people embark on separation anxiety training, I often hear them say, "I'm worried that the camera will become a pre-departure cue."

That's reasonable since every time you train you set up a camera. Your dog starts to notice the camera. That's a problem, isn't it?

Not necessarily.

If you only used the camera during training, when all your absences are safe and below threshold, and if you've never used a camera in the past (when your dog may have been left longer than he was able to cope with), then setting up your camera will actually signal "Don't worry. This is fine." to the dog.

The camera has only ever been used when things are going to be okay for the dog. Yes, he might notice it. Yes, he might know it means you're going out. But that doesn't make it a problem.

In fact, there's evidence that whether a cue predicts something good or bad, it might actually help the dog cope. A study carried out in 2014 by the University of Barcelona suggested that dogs coped better with a stressful absence when they could predict it was about to happen. This is in line with the wider body of research into stress theory.

If your dog is going to have a bad time because you are leaving him for longer than he can cope with, don't try to trick him when you leave. Equally, if things are going to be okay when you leave, use a brand-new cue that you only will only use when he's about to have a safe training absence.

The following summarizes what I have owners do before leaving for real and during training:

Type of Absence	Cues
An unavoidable over-threshold absence (Note: I thoroughly discourage these, so this as an emergency situation.)	Don't do anything special. Take keys, bags, purses; put on shoes and coats; and so on (as you would have done in the past).
A safe training absence	Use a brand-new cue to signify "I'm going out but this is going to be fine." It will be meaningless to your dog at first, but he'll soon connect the dots. The cues I get clients to include: 1. Something physical, like picking up a large book before you leave. 2. A verb cue. A favorite of mine was "she-nanigans." 3. A hand signal such as both thumbs up.

Ignore the blanket advice that pre-departure cues are bad. We only need to worry about them if the dog associates that cue with something bad about to happen. Like much to do with separation anxiety training, much depends on context.

Give it a Try

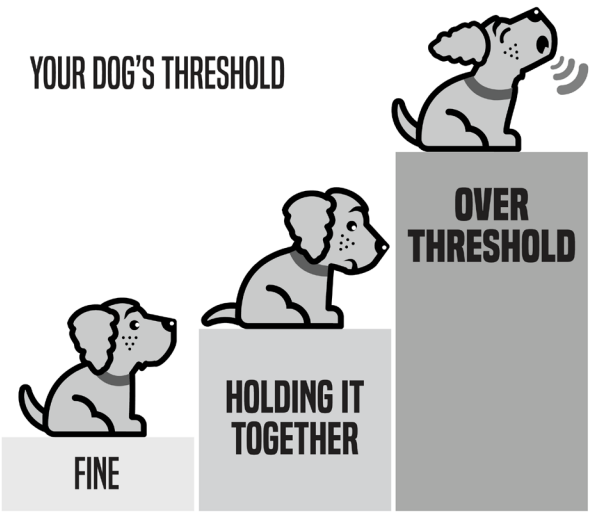
The key takeaway is to work on cues as you need to do. The worksheet you filled out previously will help you collect and sort all of the pre-departure cues.

When you first work on departure exercises where you get out of the door, pare down your leaving routine and leave out as many cues as you can. Desensitize your dog to the unavoidable ones. Then, when you achieve some nice duration—about 30 minutes is ideal—add back in the avoidable cues you previously dropped.

About Thresholds

An anxiety threshold is the imaginary line of your ability to tolerate stress, anxiety, and new situations at any given time. Thresholds are at the heart of separation anxiety training. We need to understand our dog's thresholds if we are to get a dog over his anxiety.

The following diagram shows three different levels of threshold:



The dog on the bottom step is happy and relaxed, and doesn't perceive anything threatening or scary. A dog who is okay on his own at home will always be in the "Fine" section of the diagram. We call this "threat unaware." He isn't scared and doesn't feel threatened when left home alone.

As your dog starts to perceive that something isn't right he becomes "threat aware" ("Holding it together" in the diagram). When you work on separation anxiety, you need to capture your dog as he's entering that second threat-aware zone. You don't want him to enter the next zone, in which he's gone beyond just being aware of the threat and is now in full-blown flight, fight, or freeze response to that threat.

Let's think about an example of thresholds in another context. Imagine a zebra grazing on the savanna, totally and blissfully unaware of anything bad going on in his world. We call this threat unaware.

He then sees a lion on the horizon. That starts to trouble him. He is now most definitely threat aware. His anxiety level has increased, and all of the biological symptoms of increased anxiety have also kicked in.

At this point he must decide: Does he need to seriously worry about that lion? Or, is that lion so far away that it's not a problem?

When the zebra decides that that lion is truly a threat, he tips into the third zone. Now he's not only threat aware, but he's responding to the threat. He thinks that the lion has spotted lunch, and the zebra wants to get out of there as quickly as

possible. He's in full-on panicking, flight-or-fight mode. The zebra, being a zebra, most likely picks flight rather than fight!

With separation anxiety, the threat is alone time. We have no idea why dogs perceive being on their own in this way. To us, it seems totally irrational. Having seen the body language of hundreds of panicking home-alone dogs, though, there's no doubt in my mind that, to these dogs, being isolated is an existential threat.

Learning about Your Dog's Threshold

When your dog goes over threshold, you add another bad episode to his anxiety bank. Very quickly, it can start to feel like you will never get out of the red. That is why learning and understanding your dog's threshold tolerance are so critical when training an anxious dog.

To show your dog that your leaving them for a few hours isn't scary, we need to expose him to positive experiences when he's on his own. The challenge is this: How do you make sure your dog stays under threshold? Unlike with people, we can't ask our dogs how they are feeling, but we can learn to recognize their body language. When it comes to separation anxiety, body language is key.

Let's go over a few canine communication pointers.

"He's perfectly fine."

This is how your dog should be most of the time. His face and body are loose and relaxed. Whether he's sitting, standing,

or lying, he doesn't carry tension in his body. His eyes are relaxed, and he might even give you a doggie smile.

"He's holding it together."

Your dog is beginning to feel uncomfortable. He's alert and is worried. At this point, he doesn't panic, and he doesn't freak out. He's holding it together—just. You might start to see panting, lip licking, furrowed brows, eyes starting to look "harder," and the whites of his eyes. His body will carry more tension, and his face and ears will lose the relaxed look.

"He's freaking out."

Your dog has lost the ability to control his anxiety and panic. He can no longer hold it together and has gone over his threshold. The more obvious signs are barking, whining, trembling, and shaking. The chewing or destroying routine has started. Any pacing, panting, or lip licking will become exaggerated.

Some dogs don't show their fear so overtly. They may freeze or make themselves small. With these dogs, it's important to take a very close look at their face (eyes, ears, and mouth).

When your dog panics and passes his tipping point, you will see a full-on meltdown. His fear is taking over, and it can be hard to help calm him down.

We know that humans who suffer from panic attacks often experience vicious cycles of panic. The physical side effects of panic are so unpleasant that the person suffering the attack will

panic at feeling panicked. It's possible that dogs experience the same cycle. Hence, they are right to think that your going out is a bad thing, because every time you go out, they feel terrible. The cycle of fear is reinforcing.

It's essential to avoid having your dog reach his panic mode. We need to break the rigid association between being home alone and fear.

How to Know When Your Dog Is Over Threshold

You need to become an expert at observing body language. Relaxed body language is straightforward, and by now you are likely very good at seeing what your dog's over-threshold behavior looks like. The tipping point of "holding it together" is harder to spot, and that's where video footage can really help you see and understand the in-between.

By keeping your dog sub-threshold at all times, you'll teach him that being alone isn't terrifying. He'll learn to cope on his own, and those panic attacks can become a thing of the past.

STEP 2: DO YOUR FIRST GRADUAL EXPOSURE EXERCISE

Once you've done your baseline assessment, and have that initial duration, you can begin to do your gradual exposure exercises.

These exercises form the basis for desensitization. You're going to get your dog used to being alone by showing him alone

time is safe, by going slowly, and by doing graduated departures that are short enough that he doesn't get upset.

You will need a training plan for this. Here's how to write one.

Go back to your baseline assessment. The time duration from your assessment is the basis for your first exercise.

When you do a departure, you go out of the door for a period of time and come back. Each time you do an exercise you will do that coming and going several times. I call those steps. So, you have an exercise for the day consisting of a number of steps. For any given step in an exercise you need to state how long you'll be out of the door.

You will have an overall target duration. This will be one step in the exercise. In addition, you will have shorter durations for the other steps. The target duration you choose for your first exercise should be shorter than the actual duration from your baseline assessment.

Have a look at some examples:

Assessment Time	Target Duration for First Exercise
30 seconds	20 seconds
60 seconds	40 seconds
5 minutes	4 minutes

You have your target duration, but as I noted, each exercise has a number of steps. All of those steps need to be shorter than

your target duration. If your target duration is 45 seconds, you just do that in one step. All the other steps are shorter.

Here's an example using 45 seconds as the target duration:

STEP 1	Go out for 10 seconds
STEP 2	Go out for 20 seconds
STEP 3	Go out for 15 seconds
STEP 4	Go out for 35 seconds
STEP 5	Go out for 30 seconds
STEP 6	Go out for 10 seconds
STEP 7	Go out for 15 seconds
STEP 8	Go out for 45 seconds

Notice that I put the target duration at the end of the exercise and that I mixed up the durations. Some were less than the previous step. Some were greater.

Remember that these are examples, not the times you should use for your dog. You need to develop them for your dog based on what your dog can currently do. (If you want guidance, refer to the sample plans in Appendix A.)

You might be wondering why we have so many different duration steps. Why don't we just go out for 45 seconds, eight times?

With separation anxiety, your going out the door without fuss and without reaction is massive. Yes, duration is important (and that's that goal we tend to get more caught up on), but getting out the door calmly and without fuss is a big part of training.

Each exercise is an opportunity to do both: get out the door and extend duration. The reason I put so many of the shorter steps in each exercise is that there's a high probability your dog will be able to do these short steps.

In the example above, to get to a target step of 45 seconds, the dog will have aced target durations of five seconds, 10, 20, and so on in previous exercises. When I add them to a new 45-second exercise, the dog will more than likely achieve these easier steps because he's done them before.

So even if the dog struggles at the new target duration, he still gets lots of solid practice in. And remember what I said earlier about repetition being so important to changing a dog's emotion. We need the dog to experience lots of the new association of leaving being fine in order to balance out his history of finding absences scary.

These shorter steps also act as warm-ups to the longer duration, and lots of dogs do better with a warm-up, especially in the early stages of training.

As your duration increases, you reduce the number of steps, so that the overall time you are training is reasonable. I typically start to reduce the number of steps when target duration is 15 minutes or more.

Have a look at this example, for a 15-minute target duration:

STEP 1	10 seconds
STEP 2	25 seconds
STEP 3	5 seconds
STEP 4	3 minutes
STEP 5	20 seconds
STEP 6	15 minutes

Note that some dogs do really well with this short, warm-up steps. Others struggle. Using warm-ups is a very dog-dependent decision, so observe your dog and drop the warm-ups if that works better for your dog.

Stepping Out the Door

Now that you've written your first plan, carry out the exercise.

Set up your video, just as you did for the baseline assessment. You need to be able to see that picture of your dog when you're standing on the other side of the door.

Recording is ideal, because it can be helpful to go back and look at what you've done. It's not essential, but it can make training more effective. If you're struggling to record or your app doesn't record, look into free apps that will record your screen.

Keep your plan handy. Go out the door for however long it says in step one and then come right back in. Step two, same thing.

All the time you're looking for signs of anxiety and agitation. That's important. If you see your dog getting stressed when you're on the other side of the door, come back in immediately.

How long between each training step? As a general rule of thumb, aim for about 30 to 60 seconds. You don't have to wait a long time between the steps, but vary it. Maybe between steps one and two you do 45 seconds. Between steps two and three you do 15 seconds. Between steps three and four you might do 50 seconds. And so on.

You may find that your dog is getting more agitated each time you do a step. For example, he's okay during step one, but during step two and then step three he seemed more agitated. If this happens, increase the time between steps and see if that helps.

You could come back in, hang out on the sofa, check your email, or whatever, but if you find that he needs more time between steps, take that time. If you give the dog more time between steps and that still doesn't help him calm down, call it a day and repeat the exercise the following day.

When you're on the other side of the door watching your dog, you need to be absolutely on top of looking for anxiety. No matter how far into the exercise you are or whatever the duration is, when you see anxiety, you need to come back in. That's very, very important.

What if he's barking? We've all been told that we shouldn't reinforce barking by coming back in when a dog howls. And yes, this is definitely something that we try to discourage in non-anxious dogs.

If your non-anxious dog is barking for something, try not to reward the dog by giving him what he wants. If your dog with separation anxiety is barking for you to come back, should you ignore until he stops?

Well, no. As we explored earlier, if you leave a dog with separation anxiety to bark, he's only going to get more anxious. Coming back in while your dog is barking isn't ideal—but the downside is that, if you don't come back, you're making the anxiety worse.

You must make a choice. The best choice is to come back in, because you don't want anxiety to worsen. That's way harder to deal with than a dog you just reinforced for barking when you came back in.

How is your dog when you come back? Excessive greeting used to be seen as a sign of separation anxiety, but we now know it's actually not something exclusive to dogs with separation anxiety.

Lots of dogs greet excitedly when you come back through the door. Lots of dogs greet strangers who come in the house, while you're with the dog, excitedly. An excited greeting on its own doesn't mean that your dog is either upset or stressed or anxious. He might just be really pleased to see you.

And what's excessive for one dog might be nothing out of the ordinary for another. The first thing I ask clients when they tell me about their over-the-top greeter is "What's the norm for your dog?"

Determining Your Dog's Normal Greeting

We need to establish how your dog normally greets. Then we can assess whether the greeting after being left alone is excessive and potentially a sign of stress. Here's how to do so:

1. Note what he does when you come back after some time alone. What does he do: bark, jump up, pant? How long does he take to calm down?

2. Consider how he would be had he stayed at home with someone else in the house (could be family, could be a sitter). When you return, does he act:

    - Worse than when you leave him on his own?
    - The same?
    - Better?

3. Now consider how he reacts when he goes out (with a dog walker or family). How is his greeting when he comes home? Use the same scale as with #2. Does he react:

    - Worse than when you leave him on his own?
    - The same?
    - Better?

4. Think about what he's like when people he knows (not people in your household, but friends or other family members

come to the house. Again, using the same scale, when they step in the door, does he react:

- Worse than when you leave him on his own?
- The same?
- Better?

If he always greets more excessively in scenario #1, there's a good chance it's caused by the stress of being home alone. In this case, the best way to tackle the greeting is by working on his anxiety.

If your dog isn't stressed on his own and is just a super-excitable type, then you can try other tactics. These might include:

- Teaching him a rock-solid "sit" or "down." He can't jump while he's doing one of these!
- Giving him a task, like finding a toy, or picking up your shoes and helping you put them away.

We used to think that ignoring a dog was the best way to calm him down. But ignoring a dog who doesn't just want your attention but needs your attention is quite punishing.

And if you've ever tried to do that, you'll know:

- How tough this can be when your dog acts giddy,
- That ignoring him doesn't seem to make much difference, and
- That it's hard on you too when you only want to ruffle his ears after not seeing him all day!

Getting him to do something else is much more effective—and way more fun for both of you.

STEP 3: TAKE GOOD NOTES ON YOUR TRAINING

When you've done the final step of your exercise, record data about the session. (You can find a sample worksheet at www.berightbackthebook.com.)

Record things like what he ate that day, how much exercise he had, who did the departure, and who was around. (You'll see more examples in the sample worksheet.)

Make sure you capture data every single time, even if it doesn't seem like it makes much sense at the time. Over time, trends may emerge. For example, maybe he does better at 2:00 p.m., maybe he does better after he's eaten his dinner, maybe he does better before his dinner, and so on.

Our natural tendency as human beings is to want to see progress. Every time we do one of these exercises, we want to see that he did better than he did yesterday, and that tomorrow is better than today. But the thing is, progress with training is never a straight line.

If you've ever had to learn anything complicated, you know it usually isn't a gradual or linear procession day after day after day. Also remember we're trying to change your dog's emotion, not just teach him a new trick. Don't be worried if you don't have a string of good days. Bad days will happen (and we talk about how to deal with that later in the book).

STEP 4: DO SUBSEQUENT EXERCISES

The first exercise was built around your target duration, with a number of steps around that. You'll do the same for exercise #2. But how do you decide what this target duration should be?

If your dog did well with exercise #1, make the duration a bit longer. Make it a bit harder for him—but not too, too hard. You don't want to double the time, for example.

Have a couple of warm-up steps that are short, then three or four steps that are in the target duration range, and then two steps at the end that are much shorter.

Every time he does well with an exercise, increase the duration the next time you train.

If you had a day when he didn't meet target duration, you have a couple options:

1. If your dog was close to the target duration, try the same exercise again the following day, or

2. If he was way off, give him an easier one the following day. I much prefer this option and tend to give the dog an easier exercise if he didn't absolutely ace the target duration. For example, if his target was 45 seconds and he only got to 30, I might give him 25 seconds as a target the next day. And if he did 40 seconds on a target of 45 seconds, I might drop back to 35 seconds.

With separation anxiety we go slow to go fast. If we push too quickly, as is our tendency, we're going to make the process slower overall because we're not respecting the dog's pace. We're not understanding what his threshold is and what he's comfortable with.

Never worry about dropping back in duration. If you do drop back, chances are you'll have a successful exercise, and that's what's important. Try not to get too hung up on that constantly pushing for longer durations.

In terms of frequency, do this four or five times a week. You don't have to do it every day, and you want to take days off. Just like humans' brains do, dogs' brains get tired. A rest day can really help you and him.

How long should training take? This is among the most important questions to owners. And who can blame you? Your life is on hold.

Separation anxiety training is different from most training you might have done. If you've ever taught a dog to sit, or to come when called, or to walk on a loose leash, you know that you can make some progress quite quickly with all of those things. With a good plan, lots of great treats, and the right guidance, you can train a puppy to sit in an hour, if not in minutes. But separation anxiety isn't teaching the dog a new obedience behavior. Changing a dog's emotion is fundamentally different from obedience training.

A better way to think of it is grief counseling or divorce counseling. When people go through severe emotional trauma, it can take a different amount of time for different people to get over whatever caused that upset.

If somebody went through a difficult divorce, would you ask, "How long does it take to get over a divorce?" You may, but you're not going to get a concrete answer. It depends on the per-

son. It depends on their situation that led to divorce. It depends also on what they've done in terms of talk therapy or any other things they've done to help themselves through.

Predicting how long it will take any being, whether a human or a dog, to get over an emotional trauma is difficult. Separation anxiety is most definitely an emotional trauma.

Six to 12 months would be a reasonable estimate. Some (very few) dogs get through it in three months and some dogs take longer than a year. It is impossible to precisely predict.

Even though we can't predict how long your dog will take to get over separation anxiety, we can control some things that make it go either more quickly or slower.

Rather than think, *How long is recovery going to take?* think, *How can I make recovery go as well as it possibly could?*

Here are some ways that can make it go more quickly:

1. Train regularly.
2. Don't train too often (or too infrequently).
3. Train with a plan.
4. Use a video to monitor your dog's anxiety.
5. Never let your dog go over threshold while you train.
6. Don't push too hard with your exercises. Don't get greedy about duration. Drop back if your dog is struggling and only push on if he's doing well.
7. Don't leave your dog alone for longer than he can handle.

You can also do some things that can make the training go worse/slower:

1. Leave your dog for way longer than he can cope. The problem with that is you're trying to send the message to your dog that being alone isn't scary. During the training, you have nice, safe absences. Leaving him for way longer than he can cope undoes the message that being on your own is safe. This the biggest factor that can make a difference with going slower.
2. Train too much (or too little).
3. Get greedy and push too much.
4. Be unorganized. Don't have a plan.
5. Don't use video.

CASE STUDY

Wente and Poppy

Getting Comfortable with 5-Hour Absences

Wente adopted Poppy, a beautiful gray and white Shih Tzu, in early 2018. Soon after Poppy came home Wente was shocked when she realized that Poppy was not able to be left on her own.

Her other Shih Tzu was fine being left, so Wente knew something was wrong when Poppy howled the whole time Wente was out.

At first, Wente and I discussed whether Poppy might need some time to settle in. I often come across this: newly adopted dogs who show distress at being left, but who quickly adapt. With any dog coming into a new

home, whether a puppy or an adult dog, I advise home-alone training with lots of short, safe absences to show your dog that you come back.

It's as if we need to teach dogs object permanence—that just because they can't see something, doesn't mean it no longer exists.

Sadly though, with Poppy, things didn't improve.

Wente started on desensitization training using my method. She stopped leaving Poppy, put Poppy on anxiety medication, and began exercises to gradually expose Poppy to safe absences.

Wente's hard work and commitment resulted in Poppy making excellent, steady progress. A big milestone for Wente was leaving Poppy and actually doing something real life.

Wente said, "I just wanted to let you know that Poppy was left alone for 2.5 hours today. This time, when I say alone, I mean [I] left the house and went out and did something. I had a client lunch today and thought, she's been doing so well recently, why not try it for real? Poppy walked around twice, but never barked or howled. She remained calm and relaxed. I'm so excited that she did so well! Thanks again for everything!"

Wente also said, "I think I was more nervous than Poppy was!"

This isn't uncommon. Even when we get great duration it can be scary to jump to doing something when we might not be able to run right back. None of us wants to lose progress, and I often have to coach owners to take the leap. It's so worth it, though, and by the time a dog is acing these long absences, there's very little risk in going out for real.

Poppy can now be left for five hours and Wente is no longer stressed when she leaves Poppy. A win all around.

Take control of what you can be in control of. Make this process go as quickly as it can for you and your dog. Stick to a plan and train well, and you stand a good chance of getting him through this.

We have no way to predict how long it will take, but know that you're doing all you can to get him through as quickly as possible.

STEP 5: MANAGE ALL ABSENCES

Because going over threshold can be such a deal-breaker to training, I can't stress enough the importance of finding a way not to leave your dog.

This sounds ridiculous: If your dog could be looked after 24/7, you wouldn't worry about the separation anxiety. But, remember: You must send the message to the dog that being on his own is safe, so you can't have any scary absences while you're training.

What if you can't find a way to not leave, nor to get somebody to look after your dog 24/7 tomorrow? Does that mean you shouldn't start training? There's a good chance your dog isn't going to get over separation anxiety while he's also being left, though a small number of dogs do seem to make progress despite being left.

You definitely can't leave him as much as you're leaving him today, but if you can't make sure he has company 100% of the time, why not see, next week, if you can leave him for one day

less or one hour less, and then start the training? Then the week after, leave him for a bit less, and even less, and so on.

When people change habits, some can do it cold turkey, and some need more of a gradual change. If you're one of the latter, try it. Making one change to your schedule next week means he's left a little bit less often than he is now.

Ultimately, people who haven't suspended absences quickly realize they need to stop leaving their dog because they just don't see the progress in training. On top of that, if your dog is barking or chewing or soiling in the house, the only way you're going to stop that problem behavior is to stop the absences. Managing not only helps training go better, it stops the immediate problem, too.

If all else fails, start your training while you're looking for a way to stop leaving him. Remember that he's not in a good place, he's over his threshold, and he's in a blind panic when you go out. From a humane perspective, if you could relieve some of that panic, that would be such a win for you and your dog.

CASE STUDY

Sarah and Bam

When Not Leaving Your Dog Makes all the Difference

Bam is a stunning Hungarian Vizsla with the striking, amber-colored eyes the breed is so well known for. The breed is also known for its energy, which Bam definitely has.

Sarah and her family adopted Bam from Bam's former owners, who found that they weren't up to the demands of the breed. They were out most of the day and weren't well placed to give Bam the exercise she needed.

Sarah, on the other hand, works from home. She's also an ultra-marathon runner, meaning Bam is most definitely going to get the exercise she needs.

Sarah had had Vizslas previously and was prepared for Bam's energy and drive. What she wasn't prepared for, however, was Bam's instant attachment to her. Within a matter of days, Bam would not let Sarah out of her sight.

Bam stressed if Sarah was in another room in the house, and when Sarah left the house, Bam freaked.

It took just a few days for Sarah to realize the family had adopted a dog who could not be left.

Sarah went into action mode. Her first step was to rearrange her and her family's schedules so that Bam didn't have to be alone. Then she contacted me, and we began to train Bam to gradually be comfortable on her own.

As we learned in the first assessment, Bam would throw herself against the door in anguish at Sarah's departure.

Very quickly, though, Bam began to realize that, though Sarah left, she always came back.

Sarah did such an amazing job with training. She was training in the winter and, as her exercise duration progressed, she would bundle up and take shelter in her parked car while she watched Bam on her phone.

Bam went through a progression that I regularly see: being petrified of her owner leaving to being resigned to her owner leaving. (Dogs are rarely *happy* when we leave!)

Like many owners, Sarah became the one who was anxious about departures! Bam was regularly acing more than an hour, but I had to force Sarah to do the thing she most missed: going to her Thursday-morning circuit class.

Sarah told me: "[I'm] very happy to report that I went to my circuit training class this morning leaving Bam home alone. She spent most of the time lounging on the sofa, then went into the hallway and laid down there. It's cooler! No anxiety. No barking. This is something to celebrate!"

Sarah was right to want to make sure she protected her progress. I knew Bam would be fine, though, and Sarah got to her first class in months.

Bam's progress was swift, and I have no doubt that a big part of this was Sarah's swift decision to stop leaving Bam. Sarah now regularly leaves her—and is a regular fixture at the 10 a.m. gym class once more.

THE "NO FOLLOW" ROUTINE AND WHEN TO USE IT

You will get lots of advice to work on your dog not following you around the home as a means to helping your dog overcome separation anxiety.

You might hear this protocol referred to as the "no follow" routine, independence training, or boundary work.

As I hope I have impressed on you throughout this book, my approach to training is all about efficiency. As a dog owner, you have limited time, energy, and patience. (So do trainers!)

Focus your effort on the training that is most likely to result in your dog being comfortable at home alone.

Research shows a correlation between following and anxiety when you leave. However, there is also evidence that non-anxious dogs can have a tendency to shadow their owners.

Does being hyper-attached make a dog more likely to be anxious when you leave? Or is following a symptom of separation anxiety whereby your dog follows you because your every move is a cause for concern that you might be about to leave?

Since we don't really know, I deliberately downplay the role of non-follow or independence training.

Even if there ever becomes conclusive proof that hyper-attachment is a major cause of separation anxiety, I will still advise my clients to focus energy on the ultimate detachment and independence training: getting out of the house without your dog worrying. I would only change my advice should there be proof that you only need to work on attachment in the home to fix separation.

Lots of dogs can be happy in other parts of the house, away from their owners, yet when their owners prepare to leave the dogs still freak out.

However, I prioritize home independence exercises in two scenarios: when the dog gets so upset when you try to leave that you cannot work on departures, and when your dog is so hyper-attached to you that his following has become a problem.

If either of these scenarios apply to you, focus on:

1. Desensitizing unavoidable cues.
2. Desensitizing to the door.
3. Desensitizing to you getting up.
4. Rewarding your dog for being apart from you.

We've already covered #1, so let's now look at #s 2, 3, and 4.

Desensitizing to the Door

Desensitizing to the door is a wonderful exercise for all dogs, not just those whose threshold is so low you cannot step out the door.

I often liken separation anxiety training to gradual exposure therapy for people with a fear of flying. As much as we try with desensitization to make the steps as small and gradual as we can, there comes a point with both separation anxiety and fear of flying where there is a cliff edge. With separation anxiety it's stepping out and closing the door. With flying it's takeoff.

Both are monumental for the subject.

However, we can do our best to make stepping out gradual and incremental. (The same can't be said of a plane taking off, of course. The aircraft either leaves the runway or it doesn't!)

Luckily we can work the issue on the door in small enough steps that work for nearly all dogs.

Break down your approach into small, independent steps. An example plan might look like this:

1. Walk to within 6 feet of door.
2. Walk to within 3 feet of door.
3. Walk to door and touch door.
4. Walk to door and touch door handle.
5. Walk to door and depress door handle.
6. Walk to door and touch lock.
7. Walk to door and turn lock.
8. Walk to door, open door, close door.
9. Walk to door, open door for 3 seconds, close door.
10. Walk to door, open door, step through door without closing.
11. Walk to door, open door, step through door, close door, open door, step back inside.
12. Walk to door, open door, step through door, close door, pause for a count of one, open door, step back inside.

These steps should be adjusted depending on the set-up of your home and your dog. (You might have a lock but no door handle, for example.)

Repeat each step until you see no reaction from your dog. Your dog might still be looking at you (and possibly thinking you're mad!) but as long as he is not agitated or fussing then you are good. Once you get that checked-out response, you can move onto the next step.

You can conduct this training over the course of several days—no need to do it all at one time. In fact, it's best not to do that, as your dog might find too many repetitions stressful.

When you get to a stage where you can close the door without reaction, you can try testing out duration on the other side of the door. (See "Carry Out the Baseline Assessment" on page 96.)

Desensitizing to You Getting Up

Since you getting up off the sofa can be a huge trigger to a dog who's worried about you leaving, you can use the same principles used in door desensitization to get your dog to not react when you get up.

Your plan might look something like this:

- Start to get up but only get about 1 foot out of your seat.
- Stand up.
- Stand up and take two steps.

And so on.

Rewarding Your Dog for Being apart from You

Now let's look at the part of the "no follow" routine that involves rewarding your dog for not being by your side. Start small by rewarding your dog for a calm down-stay, and progress to rewarding your dog for being a considerable distance from you.

For this your dog needs a solid sit or down. If your dog doesn't already have this, I recommend you follow a training program such a Jean Donaldson's Dog Training 101. (See the Resources.)

You're going to teach your dog a super, calm stay. You can choose whether you want that to be a sit-stay or a down-stay.

You will need:

- A mat that you only use in training. It's important that this mat only comes out when you're teaching the down-stay. Why? Because what you'll start to see as you train is that your dog immediately gravitates to the mat when you get it out at the start of training. You'll end up with a dog who automatically goes to this mat when he sees it. This effect wanes when it's left out, though.
- Plenty of great treats. Break them up into small pieces. Have them handy in a pouch. Make sure you're ready to go when you start training.
- A copy of the training plan (either Appendix B of this book or the interactive version from www.berightbackthebook.com).

The plan has a number of steps, and each step gets increasingly difficult for the dog. Also on the plan are grading rules as to how you progress from each step.

Work in sets of five. The basic rule is that if you get three out of five right, you stay on the same step and you repeat it. If you get four or five out of five correct, then you go to the next step. If you're only getting one or two correct, then you go back to the previous step.

Keep working through each of the steps until you get to the end.

The last few steps talk about you going to different rooms in the house and closing doors behind you. When you get to that stage, it really boils down to the layout of your house, so don't worry too much if the steps don't match your room setup. Just decide which steps make most sense for you.

If you cannot get through a door and close it successfully, then use a baby gate in the doorway. Before you go in and out of the door, work on going in and out of the baby gate.

Outside of training, always reward your dog for being calm. Try to capitalize on moments in the day where your dog is calm and not next to you, and reward him for that.

More Tips for Hyper-Attached Dogs

When dogs get anxious if they aren't by their owner's side, it can be near impossible to keep them below threshold and anxiety-free. This can hinder training. It's also extremely stressful for the owner who knows that no matter what they do to find care for their dog, the chances are their dog is having a bad time.

Here are my three top tips for coping with a dog who can't leave your side.

1. Spread the love.

This idea comes from the world of child psychology. When a child is overly attached to one parent, getting the non-favored parent more involved in fun activities and reducing the favored-parent involvement can help.

With separation anxiety, I advise getting two to three other people to do more of the fun stuff in the dog's life, while the current main caregiver reduces their involvement. The goal is for the dog to see that they don't need to rely on just one person for good things to happen and that they can be safe with others.

The other people don't have to be members of the family. They might be the dog sitter, daycare staff, or a friend. Make sure that these are people who can commit to being a pretty permanent part of the dog's life.

2. Find the "least worst" alternative to you.

Here you would rank different scenarios from scariest to best.

Scariest would be being on their own.

Best would be being with their special person.

Maybe your dog gets stressed when left with the dog sitter—but not as stressed as they are at daycare. Or maybe they are okay with your partner—but better than when they are with your parents.

Find a scenario that is the "least worst" and choose that as your first option for care. You can tie this in with tip #1 to get your dog to be comfortable with someone other than you.

3. Use medications.

Most dogs benefit from medication to help with their separation anxiety training. However, for dogs who are only ever okay if they are with one person, medications are a must.

This can either be daily medication or it could be a situational med (or both). The situational med would be particularly beneficial. We need all the help we can get if we are to keep these dogs under-threshold and allow the training to work.

If you have one of these extra-attached dogs, it is going to be more of a challenge to get your dog over separation anxiety, but it is doable.

CAN A TRAINER DO THE TRAINING FOR YOU?

This is an excellent approach for busy households. For general obedience-type behaviors, it's far better to hire someone to do the training if you don't have time than to not get the training done at all. You typically have two options:

1. Board and train, where you send your dog away, or
2. Day training, where the trainer comes to you while you're out at work.

Unfortunately, neither of these are brilliantly suited to separation anxiety training. Let's look at why.

Board and Train

It can seem like an obvious solution to your dog's separation anxiety: send your dog off to a trainer for two weeks and get his separation anxiety fixed.

As tempting as it sounds, board and train isn't the answer to separation anxiety. Here's why:

1. Separation anxiety is rarely, if ever, fixed in just two to three weeks.

Separation anxiety is much more complicated than teaching a dog to sit or walk nicely on a leash. Fixing separation anxiety means changing a dog's emotion, not teaching him a new trick.

If anyone tells you they can fix your dog's separation anxiety in a matter of weeks, take that as a red flag.

2. Dogs don't generalize well.

We think that once a dog is over separation anxiety, he's over it. But dogs don't work like that. Change one thing and you change everything. A new location equals new fears.

This means that taking your dog away for separation anxiety training is going to be of no benefit when he comes back home. Even if he gets over separation anxiety in the trainer's location (but see #1; he likely won't), he still won't feel safe in your house. You'll still have to do the desensitization training.

3. Your dog might be left alone in the board and train facility.

Can a board and train facility guarantee they will not leave your dog on his own, even for five minutes? Not being left alone

is crucial to a dog with separation anxiety, as you know. This rule is even more critical when in a new context. Even well-adjusted, non-anxious dogs can be upset by a new environment.

If you use the board and train option, have you looked your trainer in the eye and gotten them to swear that your dog will not be left alone? And, just as importantly, have they guaranteed your dog will not be crated?

4. Board and train has traditionally meant punishment-based training.

Not all board and train professionals use punishment. Thankfully an increasing number of highly skilled, force-free trainers are now getting into board and train.

Hurting or scaring a dog into changing behavior isn't ethical, nor is it necessary. And in fact, it isn't even as effective as force-free training.

There is no reason to use punishment to train, so don't believe any trainer who tells you it's the only or best way to train.

I often hear, though, "He came back from board and train a changed dog." If he had two weeks of punishment-based training, then what you're seeing isn't a calm dog: It's a shut-down dog who's decided the best way to avoid punishment is to not offer any behavior.

Treating fear with fear is not the way to fix separation anxiety.

5. There are no guarantees in dog training.

Board and train, when done properly by a certified, force-free trainer, can bring about huge changes in your dog. But reputable trainers who do board and train offer no guarantees because they know it is unethical to do so.

There are no guarantees when working with dogs. If your board and train facility promises results, take that as a huge red, waving flag.

So, should you just skip the board and train if you have a dog with separation anxiety?

Not necessarily. Don't send him away to work on his separation anxiety—but you could send him away for training on his jumping, reactivity to other dogs, dog play issues, and so on. Board and train can be very effective for lots of behaviors, just not separation anxiety!

Plus, having your dog stay somewhere else could be a problem-solver for you and your family. You might do it while you're on vacation or just when you need a break from his separation anxiety.

But before you book, ask the following questions:

- What training methods do you use? Look for words such as *force-free, positive reinforcement, humane, food, treats,* and *fun.* Words like *balanced, correction, leadership,* and *dominance* are code words for trainers who use punishment.

- What exactly will happen to my dog when he gets it right? And when he gets it wrong?

- What's the training plan for him? (Ask to see this.)
- How are you going to work around his need to be with someone at all times?

If you get good answers to these questions, go ahead! If you have any doubt, trust your gut, move on, and find someone else.

Day Training

Board and train isn't right for separation anxiety, but day training might help. If your dog has a fear of being alone rather than a fear of being away from you, then someone else doing a bit of desensitization training could benefit.

I have two big reservations. First, you need to do a lot of repetitions when you're working on separation anxiety. You'll have to book an awful lot of sessions with a day trainer, and that's not going to be cheap.

Second, even if you decide to invest, there is a chance that your dog might end up being fine when your trainer does the leaving (because she's done all the desensitization), but he doesn't do well when you leave.

***

Choose a specialist separation anxiety trainer if you're going to hire someone. Most separation anxiety specialists work remotely and don't offer board and train or day training.

While I'm not dismissing either board and train or day training, they probably aren't your best bet for separation

anxiety. If you are thinking of taking on a trainer, Appendix C includes some tips to help you make the hiring decision.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Separation anxiety training involves gradually exposing your dog to absences that he can cope with.
- Successful separation anxiety training requires you to:
  - » Understand your dog's anxiety threshold.
  - » Train at your dog's pace.
  - » Make training easier when he struggles and push when he's doing well.
- You also need to do your best to cocoon your dog from absences he finds scary.

CHAPTER FIVE

MANAGE SETBACKS IN TRAINING

Setbacks are part and parcel of separation anxiety training. Everyone's training falters at some point. Knowing that, though, doesn't make it any easier when it happens to you.

No matter how logically you think about it, and no matter how often you might tell yourself it will all be fine again, a setback can take the wind out of your sails.

The two main types of setbacks in separation anxiety training, and you'll likely experience both, are regressions and plateaus.

REGRESSIONS

Regressions are horrible to go through. And they happen to everyone. It's almost unheard of for a dog to get over separation anxiety without a regression. Unless there has been a change in the dog's world, it's almost certain that he will get back to where he was.

You just need to drop back to a duration that your dog is comfortable with and build from there.

Chances are your dog will get back to where he was (when he regressed) more quickly than it took him to get there the first time.

In the depths of a regression, you really think, *That's it. This is never going to work.* Everyone who has ever been through a regression thought this, too.

Though one good session doesn't make you think, *Yes, we've cracked separation anxiety,* one bad session can make many of us want to throw in the towel.

PLATEAUS

A plateau is when the needle on your target duration just doesn't seem to shift. You go up a bit in one session, then down a bit for the next, then up again, and so on.

Nothing dramatic—just a feeling of being stuck. Again, just like regressions, plateaus are normal, and they will happen.

Progression in learning is never a straight line. Yet we do tend to expect separation anxiety progression to be linear.

I liken separation training to track and field training. Each time your dog achieves a new target duration, they've set a new personal record. We expect them to do this day after day and are disappointed when they don't.

We would never expect a high jumper or a sprinter to set a personal record every time they trained, though—and just because they don't achieve a personal record doesn't mean they aren't progressing.

If we stopped worrying quite so much about the clock, separation anxiety training would be much less stressful for us and for our dogs. Easier said than done, though.

Handling a Setback

If you are facing a setback, here's my checklist for what to do:

1. Make sure there's no chance your dog could have had an over-threshold experience while he was at daycare, with the sitter, or when staying with friends and family.

2. Check that you haven't been training too much or too little. The sweet spot is around 50 repetitions (five or so exercises) a week.

3. Re-watch the video of your training sessions (and make sure you are recording) to see if there are any signs of anxiety you might be missing.

4. Think about what else might be going on in your dog's world. Has anything changed? Could there be something going on outside? Is there anything medical going on?

5. Review the data you've collected and see if you can identify any emerging patterns.

Always go through this checklist in case you might be able to point to a reason for the setback, but know that a lot of times when setbacks happen you can't identify a cause.

If you *do* spot something, you can adjust. If not, just stick with what you know: train at the dog's pace and ensure he never goes over threshold.

Why Setbacks Are So Frustrating

Rationally you know what you need to do. You need to go back a few steps and ask yourself, "What can my dog do now?" But doing that feels unbearable.

Instead, you try the same duration again. Nothing doing.

You rest for a day or two and try again. Same thing—pretty much a disaster.

It feels like a futile game of snakes and ladders. It's as if you slid all the way down a slippery snake.

Starting over never feels good, even when we know it's the right thing to do. Have you ever worked all day on a document only to find you didn't save it?

You want to cry, scream, or throw the computer out of the window. You know you could re-create the work in about a quarter of the time it originally took, but you can't face doing that. It's not in our nature to be comfortable going back over old ground.

Remember, though: With setbacks it's not really going back to square one or wasting effort. Every time you step out the door successfully your dog is learning that being alone is safe.

Whether you're out for five seconds or five hours, your dog gets another data point that says your going out of the door doesn't result in the end of the world.

My training plans have plenty of short steps, as well as longer ones so that even if you don't achieve the target duration for the day, you still got lots of successful steps in. In fact, I encourage my clients to not just count duration but also the number of successful steps they have accumulated during training.

The number of successful steps is just as important to training progress as the pushes in duration are.

Most people whose dogs have recovered from separation anxiety will tell you the bad days will happen—but that you don't lose all of your progress.

When you look back on your progress, you'll see more good days than bad. And you'll see that the progress line trends upward.

On those days when your dog does regress, it's easy to forget all the progress you've made. This is why you should track training sessions. It's amazing how motivating it can be to look back at how far you've come.

When your next setback occurs, try not to think of it as a roadblock. Think of it more as a diversion with speed bumps. You'll get back on track, but you might have to take the more scenic route for a little while.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Desensitization is the tried and trusted method for treating separation anxiety.
- The keys to doing this well, and hence not giving up, are:
  - » Training with a plan.
  - » Working in tiny, incremental steps.
  - » Using your camera to observe body language.
  - » Pressing ahead when your dog does well.
  - » Taking a few steps back when your dog needs to ease up.
- Always stick to these rules when you train!
- Regressions will happen. They are 100% normal! Don't panic. Just keep referring back to these rules.

CHAPTER SIX

SUCCESSFUL TRAINING

Now that we've looked at what goes into separation anxiety training, let's turn our attention to what makes training a success—and the mistakes you definitely want to avoid making.

SEPARATION ANXIETY TRAINING IS GRUELING

There's no denying separation anxiety training is a slog. Rewarding and effecting, maybe—but hard work nonetheless.

Like any ongoing process that delivers incremental change (think weight loss or training for your first 5K), it can be hard to stay the course.

And it can be even harder to start in the first place. I can't tell you how many times I was going to start training with my dog, but I held back—or, rather, I held myself back with my own limiting beliefs.

Eventually, I got going, and Percy and I had a happy, non-anxious ending. I kept saying that I didn't know why I hadn't started earlier.

Except I *do* know why. These five big excuses always got in the way:

1. It's too difficult.
2. You think, *I tried, but nothing worked.*
3. You think you have to be—or hire—a trainer.
4. You have overwhelm.
5. You've tried to find a way not to leave your dog but it's impossible.

If you recognize any of these, call them out. Don't let them block you from treating your dog.

It's Too Difficult

This is true. Separation anxiety is a complex condition. In fact, it's not just one condition. It's a collection of things. You might call separation anxiety a syndrome.

Yet, it is fixable, and the success rate for fixing separation anxiety is high. It's especially high when you compare it to

the success rates of treating other behavior problems, such as stranger aggression.

But training for separation anxiety takes a lot of effort. Thinking that it's too hard will stop you before you start. You need to take baby steps.

Follow the training process I set out in Chapter 4 and try to focus on the marginal gains that you get when you follow that process, rather than the outcome, which can seem distant and unattainable.

You Think, *I Tried but Nothing Worked*

As often as I have heard, "It's difficult," I have also heard, "I gave it a go but he's still not better!"

People will advise you—incorrectly—that all you must do is:

- Go out the door a few times. Give yourself a weekend and you will have done it.
- Use a bark collar.
- Ignore him and don't coddle him.
- Show him who's boss.
- Punish him for destroying the door frame.

I'm sure most of us with dogs with separation anxiety have tried some of these at some point. None of these work. Some of these will make no difference. Some of these will make your dog

worse. That's why, if you're using any of these methods, you're not making progress.

Before you throw in the towel, stop trying things that won't help. Instead, use the gradual exposure training set out in this book. That's the one method proven to address separation anxiety.

CASE STUDY

Trish, Kevin, and Iris

When Training Needs Fine-Tuning

When Trish first joined one of my free programs, she was partnering with a fabulous trainer who was working on a number of issues Iris presented with, including her separation issues.

The trainer had done a great job of getting Trish started, but progress was sticky, and Trish felt that Iris and she needed a different approach. Hence, Trish sought me out for my specialist knowledge of separation anxiety. Trish was also longing for a community of people dealing with similar issues, and the support that only comes from others living the same experiences.

Trish and her husband, Kevin, were stellar students. They followed my advice to the letter—advice that included getting Iris out of the crate for absences (she did much worse in the crate), going back to extremely short departures, and slowly building up no-stress absences.

Both were heavily involved in training, and they had a healthy rivalry regarding who could get the longest absences from Iris. Kevin made it to the hour mark first, much to Trish's annoyance (and delight, of course, that her dog was now acing sixty minutes!).

I loved their regular updates as to who was topping the Iris leaderboard.

Meanwhile, they continued to work with their other trainer for Iris's more generalized anxiety, and I'm happy to report that Team Iris continues to make fantastic progress in all areas.

You Think You Have to Be—or Hire—a Trainer

Full disclosure: You can do it without hiring a trainer. It will be easier for you if you do, but you can succeed without one.

What you do need, though, is a system. You need accurate information, crucial steps, and practical advice. The problem is the advice you can find in most books or on the internet is either inaccurate or overwhelming.

Hiring a trainer can cut through all of that. If you don't hire a trainer, you need to know where to go for the right input. That's where I hope this book will help.

You Have Overwhelm

So many of us suffer from the "big O." Being overwhelmed is the sweeping epidemic that's taking the wind from all our sails. Feeling overwhelmed leads us to engage in distracting activities. Do either of these sound familiar?

- You feel overwhelmed at the prospect of starting separation anxiety training, so you do more internet research and read more blogs.
- You started the training but got overwhelmed by what to do, so you watch some YouTube videos on separation anxiety.

You don't need more information. You need less—and it needs to be *better.*

You've Tried to Find a Way Not to Leave Your Dog but It's Impossible

There's no getting away from this one. If you're going to fix your dog's separation anxiety, you're going to need to face this one head-on.

The reason I know you can make the change is because I see owners do this over and over again. Plus, I've been there, too, with Percy. I'm the person who said, "Well, I'm okay to do the training, but not leaving him? That's mad."

Two things transformed everything for me:

1. Once I learned my dog had a panic attack every time I left him, I realized I could no longer bear to leave him on his own.

2. When I stopped leaving him, everything changed. He got better quicker. Our progress accelerated.

We all start off thinking that we can't possibly find ways not to leave our dog. But most of us get there when we realize that not leaving him is non-negotiable if we want to fix his anxiety.

Just because it's difficult, doesn't mean it's not right.

CASE STUDY

Jen and Ashby

A Dog with More than Separation Anxiety

Jen did an amazing job of turning the adorable beagle Ashby from a nervous rescue into a happy, settled, and confident dog. Managing absences was a huge challenge for Jennifer as, alongside a fear of being alone, Ashby wasn't entirely comfortable around people and other dogs.

When Jen was first introduced to Ashby the rescue made her aware of a number of issues, but Jen didn't know the full extent until she took Ashby home.

Ashby was wary of people he didn't know, though he did warm up to them. He was fine with many dogs, but some dogs set him on edge. He also struggled with outside noises at times.

But the severity of his separation anxiety was a shock to Jennifer.

On top of the fear and anxiety issues, when Ashby was stressed he developed gastric issues—scary experiences could leave him with bouts of vomiting and diarrhea. So keeping Ashby under his anxiety threshold was vital.

Managing absences was the first major challenge. This is a hard enough task with a "normal" dog, but when a dog is stressed by being at daycare or with sitters, everything is that much more difficult.

Luckily Jen did find a daycare that understood Ashby's needs.

With absences sorted, Jen embarked on separation anxiety training. She was making great progress—regularly acing an hour or more—when Ashby's wariness of people and dogs ramped up.

Now Jen was dealing with a dog who couldn't be left and who wasn't comfortable with any of the options for being cared for when Jen wasn't around. Added to this, he also started being more anxious at the dog park. His main outlet for fun and enrichment was starting to stress him out.

When Ashby's issues seem to worsen Jen was floored. But, being the determined, committed owner she is, she reached out for help and alongside the separation anxiety training with me, she worked with trainers to help her with Ashby's people and dog issues.

This extra training wasn't easy. Not only was there the time involved, but the type of training advocated to help dogs love things they are frightened of involves high-value food rewards such as hot dogs or cheese. However, Ashby's delicate stomach can only tolerate a limited number of foods. Jen had to train using only his kibble.

As with the separation anxiety training, she took things slowly. And, with time and repetition, she improved Ashby's confidence around people and dogs.

Meanwhile, she also continued their separation anxiety training, and at the time of writing, Ashby was able to achieve a comfortable two and a half hours.

Being able to suspend absences is never easy for any owner. But Jen shows that even when your options for care are limited, with determination and commitment, it is still possible.

THE ROLE OF ANXIETY MEDICATIONS

According to some studies, using anxiety medications can almost double the chances of a dog getting over separation anxiety.

Anxiety medications—when combined with behavior modification—improve all sorts of canine behavioral issues and help save lives. (According to the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior, euthanasia is the biggest killer of dogs under three in the United States.)

They also improve quality of life for anxious dogs and reduce the risk of relinquishment. On top of that they reduce the risk of physiological damage that goes along with toxic stress.

Yet, if you're anything like I was, you may be majorly doubtful about putting your dog on psychotropic drugs. However, personal experience made me shift from being the biggest skeptic to a major advocate of anxiety medication for dogs.

If you're skeptical about medication for your anxious dog, I'd love to persuade you otherwise—but I know that I'm not going to change your mind by bombarding you with facts.

Instead, I'm going to explain how I changed my mind on the issue of anxiety medications and maybe that will help you.

Not Me, Not My Dog

When we started, we treated Percy's separation anxiety with training alone, and we did okay. We plodded rather than stormed along, but we made progress. We never gained as much traction as I'd hoped, though.

At every visit, my vet would nudge me to try anxiety drugs, but I always refused. "Not me, not my dog," I would say. I didn't care if the evidence suggested Percy would do better on them.

Then, training hit an impasse and progression slowed. The setbacks frustrated me to the point of tears. I decided to try anxiety meds. It felt like my last resort.

What happened wasn't a miracle—the medication didn't cure Percy—but its addition ramped up the training. It was a tipping point in treating his separation anxiety.

Given the evidence supporting the use of medication for anxiety, why was I so reluctant to try it in the first place? Well, a nagging voice in my head chimed in whenever I considered the matter to remind me of the following "facts":

1. "The idea that a little pill can fix everything is a symptom of society's decline."
2. "But, what about the awful side effects?"
3. "You'll end up with a zombie dog."
4. "Have you tried more natural options?"
5. "Good owners don't medicate their dogs. They train them."

"The Idea that a Little Pill Can Fix Everything Is a Symptom of Society's Decline."

It feels like there is significant cultural stigma surrounding anxiety medication for people. As Mark Brown explains in a *Guard-*

ian article, this represents a shift in public opinion that started in the late 20th century:

> The popular imagination mashes together half-remembered stories of tranquillisers being prescribed to women unhappy with family life; scandals about addictive sleeping tablets; late-night viewings of One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest and a general feeling there is something not quite right about taking tablets intended to affect what happens in your brain.

If we stigmatize using anxiety medication for people, we judge even more harshly when it comes to our dogs. This is despite trainers and vets confirming dogs do better on a behavior modification plan if they are also given anxiety medication.

That's where I was. I didn't care about the evidence. Like many owners, I thought anxiety medications were wholly inappropriate for dogs. I refused—until I'd exhausted every other option.

"But, What about the Awful Side Effects?"

The side effects of anxiety medications are well-known. These drugs have been around for 30 years. Vets have used them on thousands and thousands of dogs. For the most part, the side effects are mild, and there's a small chance of any major side effects.

This doesn't stop the worry. I stressed that the meds would make my dog feel dreadful and we'd never know. Plus, people are quick to tell you about the rare cases of side effects.

When my dog started fluoxetine, I was on hyper-alert for any unfavorable changes. I used a log to record any developments and discussed the dosage with my vet during our ongoing visits.

The only changes I saw were positive. This doesn't mean your dog won't experience side effects in the first few weeks, but it's by no means a given. Your vet is there to help you make your dog as comfortable as possible.

While we're on the topic of side effects, what about the side effects of having a panic attack every single day of your life? That's the reality of being a separation anxiety dog. That amount of toxic stress takes its toll physically and, to me, far outweighs the potential side effects of medications.

"You'll End Up with a Zombie Dog."

You often hear that anxiety medications result in an unrecognizable dog.

When the right dose is reached, they don't have a sedative effect, nor do they create an unrecognizable dog. Most owners and vets confirm that.

I thought Percy would be stripped of personality and enthusiasm. I was afraid that I'd end up with a flatlining, lobotomized, zombie-like dog. What I got was the same dog, only better. In fact, if your dog does change for the worse, it's either the wrong dosage or wrong drug for your dog. Should that happen, work with your vet to find the right medication at the right dose.

"Have You Tried More Natural Options?"

I eat a mostly plant diet. I prefer to cook food from scratch. I also aim to feed my dogs food that looks like . . . well, food. That means ultra-processed dog food is out.

While I am in favor of using natural as much as I can, I also use veterinarian medications on my dogs. Why? Because there is no evidence that natural treatments are better—nor does natural equate to chemical-free. What's more, natural can mean unproven, untested, and unknown.

I want a compound that is backed by research, regulated, and proven to have the fewest side effects. This means a prescription medicine.

Yet when it came to separation anxiety, I refused to put my dog on a prescription for his condition. When I accepted my vet's recommendation that chemicals could help, I started my dog on a natural anxiety remedy.

The natural remedy didn't look natural. It came in pill form, in a non-recyclable blister pack, and it didn't come cheap. But it was as near as I dared to come to medicating Percy for his anxiety.

The result? I spent a lot of money on a chemical compound that didn't work. I invested a lot of emotion and time hoping that, with each daily dose, I might see a difference. Sadly, I didn't.

"Good Owners Don't Medicate Their Dogs. They Train Them."

Unfortunately, many trainers shame owners who use medications. Breathtakingly, these are often the same trainers who advocate prong collars, shock collars, alpha-rolls, or other pain- and fear-inducing tools.

I find this situation beyond bizarre. Aversives trainers address anxious behavior by using tools that makes dogs more fearful. Fear results in permanent damage to the dog's neurochemistry.

Positive trainers change fear with counterconditioning and medications.

I'd rather be shamed for understanding the science behind behavioral change than recommend you scare or hurt your dog. Medication gives you a better chance of beating separation anxiety. That's all. It's not training or medications, it's both. I'd argue that using medication makes you a better owner because you're improving your dog's chances of overcoming his condition.

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I try not to think, *What if I'd put my anxious dog on meds earlier?* because I can't turn back the clock. I do wonder if it might have been the more humane thing to do.

I also suspect that, given a voice, Percy might have chosen the medication route. Life on anxiety medication seemed less stressful for him. I'm sure he'd have voted for that.

If medication is something you're considering, don't think of it as a last resort. Instead, think of it as a way to turbo-charge your training from the outset.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF ABOUT ANXIETY MEDICATIONS

Now that you know a bit more about my experience about anxiety medication, and what it has done for Percy, it's time to talk about the things you need to ask yourself before you decide to medicate your dog. This is a big decision for owners.

If I had to do this over again, with everything that I know now, these are the questions I would ask myself:

- Am I ready to do the training?
- Am I prepared to deal with the consequences of the medication not making a difference?
- Am I ready to persevere?
- Can I handle the judgment?
- Am I okay with the expense?
- Have I done enough to quell my concerns?

Am I Ready to Do the Training?

If you are putting your dog on medication, you will get the best outcome if you also put time into the training. Medication is a part of the solution, not the whole solution. However, there are some circumstances in which medicating without training is an acceptable option. If your dog responds well to short-term anxiety medications, you could use the medications when you have to leave but can't get anyone to stay with him. The anxiety meds may mean that, even though he's on his own for an hour or so, he won't go over threshold.

A word of caution: Always test the medication first to see if it has the desired effect. Some dogs will still get very upset when they're left. In those cases, I always say to video your dog and be ready to come back if the meds aren't working.

Am I Prepared to Deal with the Consequences of the Medication Not Making a Difference?

In other words, what if the medications don't work? For a good number of dogs, an anxiety medication will make a difference to their home-alone issues—but not for 100% of dogs.

Thinking that medication guarantees a fix for a dog's anxiety can lead to disappointment if the medications don't have the hoped-for impact. If your dog turns out to be one for whom medication doesn't work, will you be okay with that?

Am I Ready to Persevere?

Some dogs don't improve at all with anxiety medications. With other dogs, what commonly happens is the first medication, or the first dose, isn't the one to make a difference.

If this is the case, your vet might recommend trying different doses of a particular med. Or they may prescribe different combinations of medications. Either way, you need patience. Starting a new anxiety medication can take a few weeks, as can tapering off an existing drug.

Of course, you might get lucky. Some dogs find the right drug and the right dose the first time, but for other dogs, trial and error is necessary.

Why? We know these medicines work, but research is ongoing about how and why they work. This means it's not easy to prescribe the exact right medication in the exact right dosage for your dog's condition first time. Your vet will know this and will work through different drug combinations with you.

Can I Handle the Judgment?

If others judge you about your dog's treatment, don't feel surprised, and try not to get upset.

Remember that other people are not in your shoes. You're making a decision to help your dog feel better. You're trying to improve your dog's quality of life. Don't let anyone judge you for doing your best for your dog.

Am I Okay with the Expense?

Prescription anxiety medications aren't always cheap—but they are usually a lot cheaper than the separation anxiety "remedies" you can buy online.

They are cheaper than replacing doors or taking a dog to the vet when they've torn a nail. Consider the cost of the drugs in that context.

For some dogs, you might be looking at quite a long-term prescription, but for others, it might not be. It depends on the dog.

Have I Done Enough to Quell My Concerns?

Ultimately, you're the one making this decision. You're the one who needs to defend this decision if you get challenged, so how informed are you?

If you're worried about side effects, have you done enough research and had your own questions answered so that you feel comfortable with the choice you are making?

There's a lot of great information out there. The more research I do, the more comfortable I am with medication for anxious dogs.

When researching, use Google Scholar. There's so much misinformation and scaremongering online. You don't need sensationalism. You need solid facts. Google Scholar is the place for facts.

As for side effects, dogs and people have been on these medications for years. Significant side effects are rare. In my mind,

dry mouth is less of a medical concern than a ripped nail or the anxiety of barking for eight hours non-stop.

It's a welfare issue. I want my dogs to have a good quality of life and to live as long as possible, which is why I opt for treatments that are safe, tested, and known to be effective.

What *Not* to Ask

As a final thought, here's a question I don't want you to ask yourself: "Have I exhausted all other options?"

I often hear people say, "I put them on meds because it was a last resort." Anxiety medication should be one of our first treatment options for separation anxiety, not one of the last.

But many of us (me included) prefer to try so-called natural remedies first. It's easy to get drawn in by the marketing and they seem to offer only upsides. No wonder we want to try these first.

Remember that anything that changes a being's chemistry or biology has side effects. To put it another way, if there are no side effects, it's not having any effect. So, don't be fooled by remedies that claim to change the dog's brain without any side effects.

Unfortunately, way too many of these treatments are out there. Compared to anxiety medications, the natural or complementary remedies:

- Aren't as rigorously tested,
- Aren't as proven,

- Can cost more, and
- Can be marketed much more aggressively, making us think that they're the better choice.

I'm also skeptical about companies that seem to brand themselves as natural, ethical, small businesses—and hence in stark contrast to big pharma—but that are, in fact, owned by larger, less-ethical corporations. CBD oil is a great example of this in practice. Some seemingly independent CBD oil companies are owned by tobacco and beverage companies. (We'll talk more about CBD oil in Appendix D.)

While we're busy trying those different approaches, not only does our bank account suffer, but we delay the treatment that is most likely to make a difference for our dog.

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Whether you decide to medicate your dog or not, do your homework and ask the right questions. That way, you'll know you're going into this as informed as you can be.

THE ROLE OF ENRICHMENT

Working with an anxious dog is about more than tackling the causes of anxiety. The richer a dog's life, the more productive anxiety training becomes.

When we take dogs into our homes, we protect them from hunger, disease, and predators. Our kindness keeps them safe.

At the same time, our kindness results in a form of comfortable captivity. In protecting our dogs, we no longer give them natural outlets to be dogs. And not being able to perform your natural behavior is a stress on any captive animal.

Street dogs spend most of their waking hours scavenging, foraging, or hunting for food. They navigate complicated social interactions with other dogs and spend a significant amount of time roaming.

Keeping our dogs safe is not enough. We need to put effort into finding outlets for dogs to be dogs.

Enrichment doesn't fix separation anxiety, but it's part of the training package.

Play

Little compares to play as a source of enrichment. Play engages a dog's brain and expends a dog's energy. Anyone who's owned a puppy will recognize the play-sleep-eat-play-sleep-eat cycle. There's no sleep quite like the deep sleep of a youngster exhausted from play.

Play is exhausting, and it's not just for puppies.

What's unusual about our pet dogs, when compared to other animals, is that it's not just puppies that play. Adult dogs play, too, and this sets them apart from other species. Maybe that's another reason we love dogs so much: Play doesn't stop when they grow up, just as it doesn't for humans.

As we've all seen, adult dogs and puppies play socially with other dogs and with humans, and also on their own with ob-

jects. However, as dogs get older, they become more selective about whom they play with, and they play with other dogs less frequently. They're a bit like us: When we were five, we were friends with nearly everyone in our class. As adults, we have a smaller number of friends, see them less often, and don't typically run around the playground with them daily.

Playing with your dog is a delightful connection and a beautiful reminder that it's not all doom and gloom with a dog with separation anxiety.

So, as dogs age, the nature of their play changes—but the spirit of play remains throughout their life.

You may have experienced going to the dog park only to see your once-playful dog snark off a former puppy playmate. Or you may have a ball-obsessed dog who has no interest in other dogs. You might have even used the usual excuse: "Sorry, he's dull. He doesn't like to play with other dogs anymore."

Just because older dogs play less than puppies doesn't make play any less important. Getting a puppy to play is easy, but getting an older dog to play can take work, which is perhaps why it doesn't happen as much as it should.

With a little effort, you can encourage your older dog to play.

Ball-obsessed pups are luckier than their peers, as they've discovered their passion early on in life. Like the squirrel chasers or the swimmers, they've found an outlet for their adult playfulness.

But what are the options for the dog who's decided that play with other dogs is "so last year" or who has zero interest in toys? Whereas some dogs take to chasing stuffed ducks like a duck to water, others may need to be coaxed to play with toys.

Given a little encouragement, lots of dogs can become tug maniacs, and a great many will enjoy getting stuck into a good food puzzle if food is more their thing than toys.

Another great option is trick training—fun for you and your dog.

Playing with your anxious dog is fun for him and you! Dealing with a dog you can't leave can be draining, and that can test your bond with him. But, playing with your dog is a delightful connection and a beautiful reminder that it's not all doom and gloom with a dog with separation anxiety.

Food

In addition to play and exercise, you also want to think about enrichment in the form of food.

Contrast street dogs who spend all their days looking for food with our pet dogs. We give them their dinner and it's over in three minutes.

One of the best things we can do for dogs is to take all of their rations and feed them out of puzzle feeders. No, it's not cruel. It's challenging, rewarding, and stimulating.

There's a puzzle feeder for every dog and every budget. You might need to be patient and find the right one for your dog. And your novice dog will need some encouragement, but with en-

couragement and praise most dogs end up loving the challenge of working for their food.

(For suggestions on puzzle feeders, visit www.berightback thebook.com.)

STAY THE COURSE

It might sound obvious, but another factor that sets owners who successfully get their dogs over separation anxiety apart from those who don't, is sticking with the training.

Training a dog with separation anxiety has a lot in common with losing weight. We try lots of different things, hoping we'll find that one elusive silver bullet. We rarely stick with one thing long enough.

If you've ever tried to lose weight, you know how it goes.

You pick a diet, give it a try, and find out it doesn't work. So you give up and try another diet. There are plenty of diet fads to choose from; you never run out of options. You just need to find one that works, right?

Yet when you ask dieticians and doctors about the best way to lose weight, the answer is consistent: cut calorie intake and exercise more. It's an "idea" that's been around for years, and we've all heard it.

With such simple and straightforward advice, why do so many of us fail? We fail because it is not a quick fix. To lose weight, we must make a long-term commitment to a lifestyle change. That's hard. The steadiness and—let's face it—slowness

of progress cause us to give up before we've given the method a chance to work.

So Old it Seems New

Just like the advice of cutting calories and exercising more, the gold-standard separation anxiety training method that I set out in this book has been around for decades.

> One factor that sets owners who successfully get their dogs over separation anxiety apart from those who don't, is sticking with the training.

This tried-and-true approach of gradual exposure—of getting him used to being alone—is backed by evidence. When you do it properly the technique has a high success rate. And it will hands-down beat any other approach.

Despite this accepted method, there is a deluge of conflicting advice about how to treat separation anxiety. No wonder it can be hard to know where to start or what to do.

If one method stands out, why do I hear people say, "I tried that and it didn't work"?

Here are a few reasons why:

- We don't give it long enough.
- We don't do it properly.
- We are not consistent.

We Don't Give it Long Enough

As does weight loss, getting a formerly anxious dog to be okay on his own takes time—a lot of time. It's definitely not days, it's most likely not weeks, but it's more likely months.

A better question to ask than "How long?" is "How much practice?" or "How many repetitions?"

If you've ever learned a language or learned to play a musical instrument, you'll understand this. If you'd asked your piano teacher, "How long will it take to learn the piano?" the teacher would most likely have said, "Define what you mean by learn" or "It depends on how much practice you put in" or "It depends on how musical you are," and so on.

There is no one answer.

We have high expectations of our dogs. When they don't change their behavior instantly, we think the training method we've used must be bogus. So, we try another technique.

Remember that your dog is getting over a deep emotional trauma. If you've ever known anyone who's had to overcome grief or a difficult divorce, you'll know emotions don't change quickly, no matter what we do.

We Don't Do it Properly

I'm 100% guilty as charged here. When I first tried to help Percy's separation anxiety, I read something about "coming and going through the door over and over." I tried a few times, but he didn't get any better.

You'll see this method described in many places online. The method is *not* gradual exposure therapy, but random, unplanned, and unintentional training.

Training like this is like saying you're going to stick to 1,500 calories a day, but then you grab a tub of Ben and Jerry's for dessert, guessing it's about the same number of calories as an apple.

Pure guesswork and not enough planning.

If you're going to nail separation anxiety training, you have to assess what your dog can handle now. You need to stick to a training plan, so you don't push him too far too fast.

We Are Not Consistent

Have you ever dieted and decided to take days off? Or had an exercise schedule but decided the schedule didn't apply to holidays and vacations (or to Mondays and weekends)? If this sounds familiar, you might recall the lack of consistency torpedoed progress. In some cases, it might even have derailed the whole weight-loss plan.

The same applies to separation anxiety training, especially to suspending absences. It's super important while you're training your dog to be happy on his own that you stop the scary absences. If you don't, your dog is never going to learn being on his own is okay.

One day you're doing a nice, short training absence and he starts thinking, "Oh, I'm okay. I was on my own and the sky didn't fall on my head."

Then the next time you leave him for way longer than he can handle. "Heck, scary! Mom was gone so long I was sure the world was going to end."

It's the same with dieting. If you eat 1,500 calories daily Monday through Thursday but then have 4,000-calorie blow-outs from Friday to Sunday, you'll never make headway.

DON'T GIVE UP

If you think this method doesn't work, or you've heard it doesn't, do a check. Have you given it enough time, are you doing it as you should, and are you consistent?

If you answer *no* to any of these questions, don't give up. Stick with the training for the long haul and you'll likely be rewarded by the results.

CASE STUDY

Amy and Sappho

When It's More than Just a Dog Settling In

Amy adopted lovebug Sappho when Sappho was just 10 months old. Sappho started with separation anxiety not long after Amy adopted her.

Sappho was destructive when left alone and it wasn't unheard of for Sappho not only to destroy but also to eat all sorts of things she shouldn't

when Amy went out—including cookies, breakfast biscuits, books, and candy. Sappho even once ate her way through a bag of refill hand soap.

Sappho was also vocal, which is especially problematic when you live in an apartment.

Determined to turn the problem around, Amy got a game plan together. At first, thinking it might be normal puppy behavior, Amy followed the common advice to crate Sappho. That didn't work. Sappho ate her way through a metal crate. Realizing there was more going on, Amy looked into the training protocol for separation anxiety.

First, Amy knew she needed to stop leaving Sappho. She got Sappho into daycare for the time she couldn't be home with Sappho. She was also able to modify her work schedule a little to work from home more, and she would bring Sappho to her office from time to time when she needed to be there.

Then, Amy visited the vet to discuss Sappho's anxiety. The vet prescribed daily anxiety medication (fluoxetine).

Finally, with all that in place, Amy started training. People often wonder how some owners manage to get their dogs over separation anxiety and others do not. There's no doubt a big factor in recovery is the unknown quantity of each dog's brain. But one thing that all successful owners have in common is that they train, and train. Success is not a fluke.

It's true that some owners do the work yet don't overcome separation anxiety. However, I've yet to see a dog get over separation anxiety without the owners having logged hours and hours of training.

Amy trained consistently and she trained well. She put in the hours and her diligence and patience paid off. Amy can now do normal things again, as Sappho can happily be left for up to five and a half hours.

Interestingly, Amy says she had two phases of training.

"The first, when I didn't really know what I was doing, took us months of practice to get almost nowhere. Turns out Sappho was already over threshold and I was basically teaching her to panic when I'd leave. The second phase was after our move when I joined your group and was really consistent at staying below her threshold. That's when we got real progress!"

An excellent reminder from Amy that success depends on us letting our dogs dictate the pace of training.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Separation anxiety training is a slog. It's easy to give up before you see results.
- Owners who see results stay the course, and are more likely to have used anxiety medications.
- Don't give up if you're not seeing progress. If you're doing everything right, and you're using anxiety medications, then there's a good chance you can get your dog over this if you stay the course.

CHAPTER 7

EXCEPTIONS AND SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are always going to be exceptions to training. Let's have a look now at some of the what-ifs, the how-tos, exceptions, and special considerations in separation anxiety training.

WHAT IF MY DOG DOES DIFFERENTLY WITH DIFFERENT PEOPLE OR AT DIFFERENT TIMES?

First, we have the "what if" of different people, times, and context. Many dogs do differently depending on exactly what's going on in their world at that time.

As an example, some dogs train well in the evening but struggle with mornings. Some dogs do well on weekends, but struggle during the week. Some dogs do better when Mom leaves versus when Dad leaves. Some dogs do better when it's cold out than when it's warm out.

You need to think about all of these exceptions, and this is where that data you've tracked starts to come into play.

When you start to recognize that he does better in certain contexts than others, what can you do with that piece of information? Prioritize.

If your dog does better with Mom than with Dad, but it doesn't really matter to you who leaves first and who leaves second, then put that to one side. But if, when you do the exercises, he does better on the weekends than during the week, and yet leaving in the day is the most important time for you to go, then you might want to work on that.

Use the grid on the next page to help you. You can work on the easy, low-hanging fruit, or you can work on the tough ones because they're high priority.

When you first start training, it's good to have some successes, so I encourage people to work on the low-hanging fruit because it's motivating. You'll see more progress than if you tackle the big, difficult stuff in the top right of the grid.

What if there Are Other People in the Household?

A second challenge can be if you have roommates, or if you have kids. What do you do when there are other people around who may or may not get involved with the training?

With kids, your best option is to train while they are at school or with a sitter. Then as you increase in duration—as you progress—do the training when your kids are around. At first (and provided your children are old enough) leave them in the house.

But at some point, you will need to involve them in the departure training, which I know can complicate training. See if you can make it fun. Make it a game. And get kids to buy into the idea of getting their dog to be happier when he's home alone.

If you have babies, departure exercises just reached a whole new level of complicated. Again, I suggest training while someone babysits to start.

It's common for things like strollers and car seats to be anxiety-inducing cues, so you might need to desensitize your dog to those. Then introduce the baby into the equation.

CASE STUDY

Jenna and Brody

How Jenna's Babies Got Involved with Training

Jenna, a young mom with two children (ages 3 years and 6 months), was also mom to two fur kids, Brody and Lexi.

When Jenna came to me, poor Brody, a Havenese, was a mess. His anxiety at being left was so bad that even before Jenna tried to leave, Brody would quake and tremble.

Brody's condition, and the fact that he couldn't be left, put a huge strain on the family. As Jenna said, "Brody was my first baby, and I wanted to do everything I could to help him. But at the same time I was trying to balance his needs with [those] of my husband and my girls."

Jenna's biggest challenge, aside from just how bad Brody's separation anxiety was, was working out how to involve her girls, Charlotte and Sophia, in the training.

I advised her to first do the training when her mom could watch the girls. I wanted Jenna to build some duration before she added the complication of getting the girls out of the house too.

Meanwhile, I also suggested a medication consultation with Brody's vet, and Brody's vet put him on fluoxetine.

Jenna achieved early progress with Brody, without the girls being involved, so we then added in the girls as the extra parameter.

Complicated doesn't even begin to describe it. Jenna was training during a Canadian winter. To get out of the door she had to bundle up a baby and a toddler, as well as herself, put the baby in the bucket seat, and usher everyone outside to the car, where she, Charlotte, and Sophia sat out the exercises while watching Brody on camera.

Jenna was so diligent and determined. Despite the effort required for her to train she kept at it. One morning I received a message that included a picture of Jenna and the whole family out to brunch. It had been Jenna's goal just to be able to do things with the family again, so this photo was so symbolic.

Jenna said, "Your training saved my family, Julie. Before we started, we were at breaking point. But now I can see that we are going to get Brody through this. Best of all, my husband believes it too. He did think we should consider giving Brody up, but now he's all in. Thank you!!!"

Jenna is now back at work, and Brody is acing two four-hour absences a day.

If you share a home with other people, you'd ideally like to be able to do the training with them out. Eventually, you want to be able to get them to do the leaving too.

See if you can work on the following scenarios:

1. Train when no one else is home but you.
2. Train with your roommates leaving with you.
3. Train even if people are around. This is not as helpful as training when no one is home, but if you can't arrange #1 or #2, give this a go.

What if There's Another Dog in the Home?

Another dog may make no difference to your exercises whatsoever. Here are two scenarios in which it might:

1. Your anxious dog is being triggered by the other dog's (non-anxious) barking at noises outside.

2. You try to do the exercises, and your second dog gets over-excited and sets off your anxious dog.

If you're struggling with #1, then your best bet is to attempt to mask the outside noise with music or white noise. You can also train your non-anxious barker to be less reactive to outside noise. It's easier to put a halt to this type of barking when you're around, of course. When you're gone there's no one to ask him to be quiet. But you could well find that if you work on this reactive barking, it may well be less of an issue when you aren't there.

If #2 is your issue, then try crating the non-anxious dog or confining him to a different room while you train.

If you think that your other dog makes your anxious dog more comfortable, though, then involve that other dog in the training.

Lots of people worry that one day they're going to have to take their other dog to the vet or groomer, and how will the anxious dog be? But those are quite exceptional circumstances. Dog training takes a lot of effort, so it pays to train for the most common things first and then worry about the extreme exceptions.

What if Both Dogs Have Separation Anxiety?

This is not as uncommon as you might think. Some studies suggest that 20% of dogs have separation anxiety. It's not that one dog caught it from the other dog, it's just that you got doubly unlucky.

If you have two dogs with separation anxiety, your training will go at the pace of the slowest dog. Conduct the baseline assessment with both dogs present and note the time that the first dog gets anxious. As you progress through training, continue taking the lead from the dog who's finding training hardest.

What if He Follows Me to the Door during Training?

Doors are exciting things for dogs. If you think about it, a ton of fun stuff happens on the other side of the door: car rides, park outings, walks, exciting visitors arriving.

No wonder dogs love to check out what's going on at the door. So no, following you to the door is not, on its own, a sign of anxiety.

If your dog looks distressed, agitated, or panicky when you head to the door, that's different. In that case, your dog is following you as a sign of upset.

We also need to remember that no dog, even a non-anxious one, is happy when we leave. They might not panic, but they can be disappointed. After all, pretty much everything fun in their life happens when we're around or when we take them out.

I explain to owners that a natural progression with separation anxiety training is for a dog to go from anxious to disappointed. It's rare to see a dog go from anxious to delighted that we're leaving, so no wonder the following behavior can linger.

What if He's Awake during a Long Absence?

Dogs sleep for about 14 hours a day—more if they're a puppy or a senior dog—so it seems we should expect them to sleep while we're out.

But while lots of dogs will sleep the whole time you're out, others will amble about. They might check out different places to sleep, watch the world out the window, or maybe even investigate your garbage.

It's wonderful to see a sleeping dog on camera, but don't panic if he's awake. If you can't see any signs of anxiety, then just let him keep doing his thing.

If your dog is falls asleep during the absence, is it a cause for concern if he stirs? No, not a bit. Just like us, dogs have periods of wakefulness during their sleep. While you're watching him on your camera you may see him wake, move, go for a drink, or wander around. This is perfectly normal, and we could expect this pattern in dogs who are fine at home alone.

You only need to worry if your dog wakes but then starts to appear anxious. And you know what you're looking for here: scanning, pacing, hypervigilant, lip licking, panting, and increasing vocalization.

Otherwise, stay put and keep watching. You may very well see him settle down again.

Sometimes training gets stuck when dogs who fall asleep during training always gets anxious as soon as they wake up. If this is your dog, go back before he wakes up. This will wake him up, of course.

Let him settle, then do another departure. This will teach him that waking up doesn't equate to you staying. And it helps him learn how to settle.

CASE STUDY

Maria and Buster

Teaching a Dog to Settle Himself

Buster was one of those dogs who aced separation anxiety training up to the point where he fell asleep. Waking up caused him to startle and freak, and Maria worried that she would never get over that hump.

This is a common scenario for anxious dogs, and human moms tell me that's it's not unusual for kids to go through a period of poor sleep, in which the natural wake-up cycle unsettles them to the point they cannot get back to sleep.

Buster is a great example of how sometimes we need to be creative to fix separation anxiety. The basic rules of training don't change; we still use what we know about how dogs learn. But sometimes we need to be creative about how we apply those rules.

To deal with Buster's waking-up anxiety, Maria would return before he woke (and hence before he got anxious). Rather than end the exercise with that, though, Maria would wait for Buster to settle and then go out

again. This showed Buster that waking up wasn't scary—but also that it didn't mean that Maria would be back to stay.

Gradually Buster learned that he could wake and settle even if Maria wasn't around, which meant that Maria could stretch out the duration of her absences.

Maria sent a wonderful photo of her and her family at a movie together for the first time since they adopted Buster. It's not the big, audacious goals that count, but the modest, everyday ones—like going out for a couple of hours as a family.

What if He Barked Partway through an Absence?

Barking can be tricky to assess. Dogs bark for all sorts of reasons. Excessive and continued barking is a canonic sign of separation anxiety. Sometimes, though, dogs bark because they heard a car door slam or another dog bark outside.

Again, you need to take the behavior in context. Did you hear anything outside? Does he bark at noises in the street when he's home with you?

Because outside noises can be such a trigger, I recommend playing music or white noise for any dog being left alone.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Desensitization training is by far the best way to get a dog over separation anxiety. But there are elements you may want to consider.

Using Food

Rewards-based training is the best. Dogs love it because it's fun and it doesn't involve fear or pain. And best of all, it works. In fact, research shows that it works better than any other method. Hands down, the best tool for training is food. Despite the fabulousness of food, though, it's best left in the cupboard when you're training a dog with separation anxiety.

It's not that we couldn't use food for separation anxiety training, it's just that we don't need to. When it comes to separation anxiety, the aim of a good trainer should be to keep things simple for the owner. The more things a trainer asks you to do, the less successful you are likely to be.

So if food is so marvelous, why don't we use it for separation anxiety training?

First, separation anxiety training is not about obedience training. Sure, we could try to address separation anxiety by training a reliable down-stay that stops the dog scratching at the door, but even competitive obedience dogs won't hold a stay the whole time you're at work.

Second, a good number of dogs won't eat while their owner is absent. Interestingly, this includes both dogs with separation anxiety and non-anxious dogs.

Anxious dogs who do eat while you're out tend to chomp, devour, or practically inhale their food. They aren't exactly showing relaxed, home-alone behavior.

Third, for those dogs who will eat when you're out, food often just distracts them from the fact you're gone. Once they finish the food, the panic sets in—and a frozen Kong will only last so long.

However, don't drop food entirely from the equation. Food is ideal for use in puzzles to keep busy minds occupied, and this type of enrichment is an important part of the overall treatment program for a dog with separation anxiety.

Food can also be used as management. For example, if your dog will eat when you're out, and is okay for the time it takes to eat his frozen Kong, use that time to get groceries or pick up the kids from school.

With some clients, I do use food, by employing remote-controlled treat feeders. They aren't cheap, and using them requires a very specific training technique.

These can be fine for some dogs, but they don't always help when we're doing separation anxiety training. Here's why:

1. Some dogs stress when the treat shoots out.
2. The treats eventually run out, and then very often your dog freaks out.
3. You have to be watching, so this isn't a solution that always makes sense (when you're going to the movies or driving, for example!).

Will Getting a Second Dog Help?

Have you heard the one about how getting a second dog will fix your dog's separation anxiety? So many people on social media say it did the trick for their dog.

Is this the magic cure you've been searching for? Maybe. But probably not. There are so many of these "get a second dog" stories that it really can seem like a persuasive idea. Know that, for all the success stories, there are more situations when a second dog made no difference.

Research shows getting a second dog does not always improve the existing dog's issues with being home alone. In these studies, the second dog made the most difference when the anxious dog had lost a housemate.

Most dogs' separation anxiety, though, was not affected by a new dog in the household. We really don't know why, but for most dogs with separation anxiety, only human company will do.

And what if you get a second dog but it doesn't cure your other dog's separation anxiety? Where does the situation leave you? You've doubled your vet fees, your food costs, and your gear costs.

Over the life of a dog, these things add up. According to a study published in 2018 on Petfinder, a reasonable estimate would be $1,500 for the first year and $1,000 every year after.

These estimates don't include boarding, emergency vet care, elderly dog vet care, grooming, dog walking, or training. Another dog not only brings the certainty of extra costs but also the likelihood of more chaos. And who's to say your second dog will come without behavioral issues?

Sure, they might not have separation anxiety—but it's very unlikely your second dog won't have some issue at some point in his life. (I have three dogs so I know the joy—and chaos!—multiple-dog households can bring, and I certainly won't tell you not to get a second dog.)

Dogs in households with other dogs must negotiate complex social interactions every day. This complexity is so good for their brains. And there are lots of amazing dogs in shelters who are desperate for a home, so go for it: get a second dog—but do it because you want a second dog.

Do it knowing you probably won't fix your dog's separation anxiety. And do it knowing you're up for the challenge an extra dog can bring. Ask yourself, "Would I still get another dog if I didn't think it would fix my other dog's separation anxiety?" If the answer is yes, then go ahead. You never know: You might—just might—find it does sort out the separation anxiety. If so, win-win.

If you want to test the idea, see if you can become a foster. Take in another dog for a week and see what happens to your dog's separation anxiety. You'll be doing something wonderful for the foster dog and at the same time working out whether a companion will fix your dog's separation anxiety. There still may be no guarantees.

Puppy Separation Anxiety

Older dogs are not the only ones affected by separation anxiety: Puppies can be affected as well. Though there is no clear research, there are arguments that point to a genetic connection with separation anxiety.

Some owners (me included) have reported separation issues very early on. So anecdotally at least, it seems that puppies can come "preloaded" with separation anxiety.

Is there anything you can do to avoid your puppy having separation anxiety?

Here are my top-three suggestions:

1. Avoid puppy mills.
2. Crate train without fear.
3. Do home-alone training.

Avoid Puppy Mills

First, get your puppy from a reputable breeder. How can you tell if they're reputable? It can be hard. Puppy mills have all sorts of ways of tricking you into thinking your puppy came from a breeder. The headlines are:

- Don't buy online.
- Insist on visiting the puppies and seeing their parents.
- Find a breeder who won't let you take a pup home any younger than eight weeks.
- Don't get a puppy shipped, even if you found a rare color/breed you're desperately searching for.

Perhaps most importantly, trust your instincts. I love facts, but sometimes we can trust our own instincts. If you have even so much as a hint of anything not passing the smell test, walk away.

If you suspect your puppy came from a puppy mill but you didn't realize it, don't feel bad. As I've said, these outfits are getting bigger, slicker, and way more devious. They can fool anyone.

Crate Train without Fear

Housetraining and crate training go hand in hand. It's easier to housetrain a puppy that you can crate, but separation anxiety and crates don't go well together.

Even non-anxious puppies will need a gentle introduction to their crate. Never assume any puppy was born to love his crate. On that first day, you'll need to work on both housetraining and crate training.

Housetrain by being super vigilant. You might not be able to crate him for long periods at the beginning. Tie him to your waist on that first day if you can't crate him. That will help you avoid accidents.

At the same time, introduce your puppy to his new crate. Make it a magical place where treats drop from the sky and food bowls appear from nowhere. He'll soon want to spend more and more time in this amazing place.

Puppies who don't have separation anxiety get accustomed to their crates quickly. They will whine to come out at times, but if they've had food and water, had a good play, and gone outside, and it's nap time, then you can ignore normal puppy whines.

Note that I'm not saying to ignore your howling puppy and leave him to cry for hours. I mean that non-anxious grumbles

from your protesting puppy can be ignored. He's not anxious, and all his needs are met.

How can you tell a normal puppy whine from an anxious whine? The big differences are persistence and frequency. Protesting whines for a normal pup won't last long, and he won't always do them. There will be times—even on the first day—when he'll toddle into his crate and be as happy as can be.

This is key. If a puppy is anxious in his crate, he'll most likely display crate anxiety all the time. He'll be reluctant to go in there, and he'll take a lot longer to warm up to the idea of the door closing on him.

Do Home-Alone Training

Spending time with a puppy is rewarding and fun. When we first get a puppy, we want to be with him as much as we can. Puppyhood is a precious time and it passes so quickly. So, we play, cavort, and goof around with our puppy. Then we put him in a crate, with little or no stimulation—and we leave!

Puppies need to learn to be alone, though. We should prioritize home-alone training for puppies the same way that we prioritize housetraining and socialization.

If your puppy is younger than 12 weeks and still in that golden period of socialization, now's the time to teach him that your leaving is uh-may-zing!

When you leave your puppy, leave often and for short periods of time at first. When you do go, make incredible things happen—like a bully stick or his favorite food toy.

Make him realize you going doesn't mean the fun stops. Far from it: It means good things happen!

No Guarantees

I can't guarantee that by following these steps you will prevent separation anxiety, but if I got a new puppy, I'd make this my game plan.

If your puppy already has separation anxiety, it's not too early to start training. Separation anxiety training will help your puppy learn that being alone isn't scary.

What about Senior Dogs?

Owning senior dogs can be so rewarding yet, as every owner knows, they can also be a source of heartache and worry. Late-onset separation anxiety is a particular concern to owners of older dogs.

Dogs can develop separation anxiety in their later years for many reasons, including:

- Loss of sight or hearing, presumably because the dog feels compromised by his reduced sensory ability,
- Becoming less resilient to change and finding changes in the household very challenging, and
- Medical conditions and the increasing number of vet appointments that many older dogs face.

What you may not know is that many older dogs present what seems to be separation anxiety, but is, in fact, a form of

doggie dementia, a condition called canine cognitive dysfunction, or CCD.

CCD symptoms that can easily be confused with separation anxiety include:

- Increased agitation and anxiety,
- Slip-ups in housetraining in a previously housetrained dog, and
- Increased barking/vocalization.

If you believe your older dog has separation anxiety, the critical question is: When did his separation anxiety start?

If symptoms started recently (that is, your dog hasn't had this for most or all of his life), your first step is to talk to your vet. If everything else is ruled out (CCD in particular), then you can proceed with training. You *can* teach an old dog new tricks. More importantly, separation anxiety training, when done properly, isn't physically taxing or grueling on your dog. It can be used on older dogs without fear of causing more issues.

But, as you've learned, this training isn't quick. It's vital to lower your expectations of what might be possible.

Meanwhile, as you wait for training to work, you can find ways to have someone watch your distressed dog. It would be nice to think that he doesn't have to be frightened and alone in his later years.

The great thing about senior dogs is that often they are very easy to have around. You might be surprised by how many people would be happy to have your dog for an hour or two.

You can definitely get your senior over his fear of being alone. As with an anxious dog of any age, the change will take some time. It will also take a great deal of patience on your part.

Think about how rewarding it will be to help your older pup be anxiety-free in his later years. You might not be doing anything else that is quite as important for your dog as helping him feel comfortable and safe in his home while you are away.

CASE STUDY

Shannon, Chad, and Tucker

You Can Teach an Anxious Older Dog New Tricks

I'm frequently asked whether older dogs can get over separation anxiety. My experience is that they most definitely can. People assume that younger dogs find it easier to get over their anxiety at being left, but age is not that big a determinant of success.

Shannon, Chad, and Tucker are a great case in point.

Shannon and Chad rescued Tucker about when he was approximately 8 years old. Tucker was an owner surrender with no real background provided.

They didn't know he had separation anxiety when they adopted Tucker. In fact, the shelter thought he would be totally fine alone because he was so "chill." But for an old guy he had been through a lot with all the transitions from whatever his past life was, to shelter life, to a new home.

When Tucker first came home his separation anxiety symptoms included howling/barking non-stop and sometimes destruction.

So Shannon and Chad set to work to try to help Tucker feel happier alone. First, they started with crate training and he got up to 45 minutes, until one day Tucker decided he didn't like it one bit!

They then started to give him free rein of the house. They left Tucker for increasing increments and he did okay. But, then he started to learn Shannon and Chad's leaving routines and anticipated their leaving. This skyrocketed his anxiety.

They finally called a separation anxiety trainer but the cost was too high. They couldn't afford a trainer and daycare costs too.

Shannon came across one of my free training programs. Tucker did so well with the training methodology that Shannon and Chad committed to continuing the training using my method.

It wasn't easy though. Managing absences took a lot of plate spinning. Then, soon after starting Shannon and Chad were away for their honeymoon, so Tucker had to take that in his stride. Even though they were up to almost 20 minutes when they left for their trip, when they returned they eased him into training to help avoid any setbacks.

Within four months of starting to work with me, Shannon and Chad started to notice a big difference, especially with Tucker's ability to be left in the evening.

They've also noticed a big change in Tucker overall as a dog since they got him. His personality and confidence have grown and continue to.

Like all separation anxiety journeys, Team Tucker experienced ups and downs; major regressions are just par for the course with this condition.

However, at the time of writing, Tucker is up to nearly three hours consistently! Shannon and Chad were recently rewarded for all their hard work by being able to go out to dinner together without getting a sitter for the first time since they rescued Tucker!

Tucker still finds it harder to be left in the morning than the evening, but that type of scenario is incredibly common for dogs with separation anxiety. Shannon and Chad continue to train hard both mornings and evenings.

Shannon said of the whole process, "I think Tucker trusts us in so many more ways now, and especially with leaving—that trust took training and exercises to build, but it's so worth it!"

They know there is still work today, but Team Tucker have shown that you can teach an older dog new happy home alone tricks.

SETTLING IN: POST-ADOPTION ANXIETY

It's common for dogs who are in a new home to be unsettled. The behaviors we see might look very similar to the problem behaviors that dogs with separation anxiety demonstrate.

What can you do if your newly adopted dog howls, cries, destroys, or defecates when you're out? Review the "Common Signs of Separation Anxiety" section in Chapter 1, which outlines how you can tell if your dog is upset or is just looking for something to do. If you conclude that this is more than boredom, start desensitization training.

"But what if it's not separation anxiety and he's just unsettled in a new home?" you might ask. The good news is that if he just needs a bit more help with being alone in his new home, you'll rattle through the training.

You really have got nothing to lose. All dogs benefit with being eased into a new home.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- There are some rules to separation anxiety training that apply to all dogs. But there are also lots of exceptions.
- Every dog's recovery will be slightly different. They might do differently well at different times of day or with different people. This is all perfectly normal, manageable, and trainable.
- Puppies, senior dogs, and newly adopted dogs need special consideration. All of these dogs might exhibit separation anxiety but may actually have another problem that happens to look like separation anxiety.

CHAPTER 8

SEPARATION ANXIETY: SURVIVING AND THRIVING

You're doing the training, you're managing absences, and you've wrapped your head around regressions. There will still be times when separation anxiety training feels too tough.

This chapter outlines my "secret sauce" for separation anxiety success:

- Get support from other people who have dogs with separation anxiety, and
- Make training a habit.

Let's explore these.

GET SUPPORT FROM OTHER PEOPLE WHO HAVE DOGS WITH SEPARATION ANXIETY

At the risk of sounding dramatic, separation anxiety is a socially isolating condition. Having a dog with separation anxiety sets you apart. Other people won't "get it." No one understands what it's like to own a dog with separation anxiety until they have one themselves.

Instead of going it alone, connect with other owners facing the same challenges. In this highly networked world, there are many ways to reach out to people who are experiencing what you're going through.

Here's why teaming up will help you:

- Separation anxiety training is simple, but it isn't easy.
- Teaching is the best way to learn.
- Sharing stories lightens the load.
- You can team up with accountability buddies.
- Communities are pivotal to good habits.
- You can get help with the basics.
- You simply know you're not the only one.

Separation Anxiety Training Is Simple, but it Isn't Easy

When done properly, separation anxiety training using desensitization has an excellent track record. However, there are going to be times when you think you will never get there. Chatting with other owners who are working on the process—especially when you're stuck—will remind you of the highs, not just the lows. If you have an active group around you, there's a strong chance one of them will be up when you're down. You, in turn, can support others through their dips.

Teaching Is the Best Way to Learn

Even though it's a straightforward process, there are many moving parts to the training method. One area for which you might benefit from input is reading your dog's body language. Another pair of eyes on your dog may help you see something you're missing. And you can reciprocate. You'll likely get better at reading your dog by helping others assess their dogs.

Sharing Stories Lightens the Load

While separation anxiety is undoubtedly a serious topic, it does have its lighter side. If you think about it, we owners do some odd things:

- Exercises where you go in and out of the front door 15 times—even without a coat in the winter—because you haven't reached the "put coat on" training step yet.

- Standing in the street and listening for your dog, while whispering to your neighbor that everything is okay but that you can't chat right now because you're trying to hear what your dog is doing.

- Sitting in a coffee shop and Skyping your home laptop so you can spy on your dog. (Who Skypes themselves, people?)

- Getting so excited about seeing your dog sleeping that you share screen grabs with your friends. "Look, I just went out, and he slept the whole way through. ERMAHGERD!" If your friends are anything like most people's, they politely indulge you while at the same time thinking, *Uh, it's just a sleeping dog. Get over it!*

In the midst of separation anxiety, all of this is routine. But no one else you know will understand. If you've done any of the above, you need to connect with other owners of dogs with separation anxiety because they will understand.

You Can Team up with Accountability Buddies

Having goals and getting others to hold you accountable to those goals helps enormously. "How long will it take?" is the one question everyone asks. What I love about connecting owners is that this becomes less important than "How's my dog progressing?"

It's not that it isn't important to know how long it might take for the challenging stuff to end, of course. It's just that I see owners go through a refreshing change in which they start to become motivated by progress and not by "Is this over yet?" syndrome.

By having a support network, you can embrace the notion that celebrating the small successes along the way motivates you to get to your end goal. It's the same with any behavior change, like going to the gym, losing weight, or learning a new language.

Communities Are Pivotal to Good Habits

Separation anxiety training is best done little and often. This means you must get into the habit. Much has been written about how habits form, but community and accountability are big factors. We're more likely to do something if the people around us are doing the same thing. We're more likely to stick with a new behavior if others we know hold us accountable.

Join a group of people going through the same training process. The owners I work with all get access to a membership club and private forum, where they share their progress, have space to vent, and connect with people going through the same thing.

Even if your community isn't specifically for separation anxiety, find buddies to help you stick to your training schedule. Share your plan and get them to keep you on track when you're struggling.

You Can Get Help with the Basics

Even if your separation anxiety group is an online community, they can still assist with practical, local matters. Take managing absences. There will be times when you are in a bind. Perhaps something unexpected came up or maybe a sitter canceled. See if your online community can help.

The internet shrinks the concept of six degrees of separation. Even if you're in Tampa and they're in Toronto, they may know someone who knows someone. Or they may have some brilliantly creative idea you've never thought of. Or—who knows—maybe someone in your online group is close enough to jump in and help.

You Simply Know You're Not the Only One

It can feel like you're the only person with a dog who has separation anxiety, but when you join a group, you'll be astonished by how many other people are going through the same thing.

MAKE TRAINING A HABIT

The second ingredient in my secret success sauce is all about making your separation anxiety training a habit. You may have heard it takes about three weeks for a new behavior to become a habit. Actually, there's no evidence for the magic number of 21 days. In fact, research by University College, London shows it takes longer—about 70 days or more.

This matters because we get impatient and expect new ways of doing things to become habits far quicker than we should. If we expect something to start feeling easier after three weeks, we might be disappointed. We need to give behavior change at least two months before it gets truly sticky.

Use "Cue and Reward"

Cues and rewards help us develop habits. Having a cue prompts your brain: It's time to do that thing. Your cue might be "Do the training before we cook dinner." You do the training every night at the same time, just before dinner, and prepping dinner becomes the cue.

Rewards help because our brains are programmed to respond to rewards. But the challenge is we are programmed to value immediate rewards, not rewards that we might get in a few weeks, months, or years. That's what makes saving for retirement or going to the gym so difficult: It takes a long time before we get a payback.

The same is true with separation anxiety. We put a lot of effort in now, but the reward of being able to leave our dog for any length of time comes much later. To stay motivated with training we use short-term rewards. Here are some suggestions I use with clients:

Immediately after Training Session

- Let yourself have dessert for a change.
- Watch an episode of your favorite Netflix show (say you'll watch it after you train).
- Do something mindless like surf YouTube or Facebook.
- And while you're on Facebook, do something meaningful, like share your successes with your owner peers and let them congratulate you.

- Take a long, hot bath.
- Pour a glass of wine.
- You decide! _____

At the End of a Week of Training

- Buy that top you've been eyeing.
- Go out to eat. (Either go somewhere you can take your dog or arrange a sitter.)
- Get a dog sitter and go see a movie.
- Book a massage or a spa trip.
- Arrange a sitter just so you can do something you've been missing doing.
- You decide! _____

Make it Easy

If you make the process as easy as you can and remove obstacles, then you're more likely to do what you said you'd do. For example, one study showed that gym-goers who lived closer to a gym were more likely to go than those who lived one and a half miles farther away. Another study suggested that if the gym is on your direct route to work then you're more likely to go.

Ease can also make us fall into bad habits. Think about how much more likely you are to eat chocolate if it's left on the

counter than if it's put away in a cupboard. Or how easy Netflix makes it for you to watch the next episode of your favorite series by auto-playing it.

Being lazy makes sense from an evolutionary perspective. When you're hunting for food, and calories are hard to come by, taking shortcuts makes sense. Doing anything that requires effort doesn't.

With separation anxiety training, reducing the effort you need to put into it might mean buying a dedicated webcam you leave set up or always having your training plan printed out and handy.

Do it as Early as You Can

As a day wears on, more can get in the way of training. It might not make sense to do separation anxiety training first thing in the morning. But if you aim to train in the evening, why not do it before dinner, TV, yoga, or whatever else you have planned?

Track Your Training

By charting progress, you'll see how far you've come even when you feel stuck. Log your training to help you see progress.

Recognize Your Excuses

It's easy to use the same reasons not to do something. There's always something else we could do. But experts tell us that if we start to spot our pattern of excuse-making, we can reduce the power of those excuses.

Be Kind to Yourself

Self-criticism kills motivation. Our critical inner voice can easily crush our enthusiasm.

So what if you think you should have started separation anxiety training months ago? And who cares if you don't do it as often as you should? The fact is it's on your list. You're committed to doing something about it. And as you'd say to a friend in your position, you must start somewhere.

Instead of being critical of what you haven't done, be kind to yourself and recognize that tackling separation anxiety is tough. You deserve credit for even acknowledging your dog has separation anxiety. Many people don't even do that.

Focus on the Process, Not the Outcome

As James Clear puts in his book, *Atomic Habits*, winners and losers have the same goals.

Every separation anxiety owner wants to get their dog to get past separation anxiety. That goal alone doesn't help us with motivation. What's far more motivating is to look at the little wins—the tiny changes—and to celebrate those. Each step in the process that gets you closer to being able to leave your dog is a win.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- You don't need to do this on your own. In fact, you'll do better if you feel part of a community of owners who are experiencing the same thing. Join groups and online programs, ask people at the dog park, whatever! But make sure you seek out people who understand.
- It takes a village to fix separation anxiety.
- Make training a habit and you're more likely to stay the course.

CONCLUSION

WHY ARE THERE NO QUICK FIXES FOR SEPARATION ANXIETY?

Many people find separation anxiety training to be a grind. That can be because we're trying to change emotion.

Hopefully you are now fully aware that your dog isn't being bad or mad when you leave him. Dogs bark or destroy because they're frightened. Fear is easy to develop but hard to lose, especially when it comes to distress regarding being home alone.

To stop the fear, we must change the cause of the fear, not the symptoms of the distress.

Anyone who sells you a quick fix for separation anxiety either doesn't understand how dogs handle fear or, worse, is deceiving you.

There may be no quick fix, but separation anxiety training has a high success rate.

You can make your dog more comfortable with being home alone. You can get him over his fear of separation. The training won't stop the barking tomorrow—but if you stick with the training, you can stop the barking.

There may be no quick fix, but separation anxiety training has a high success rate.

Worrying about being kicked out of your apartment or coming back to destruction is the worst feeling, as I know all too well. So, if your neighbors complain and you need to do something today, what can you do? Since the barking only stops when the fear stops, if you have to stop the barking tomorrow, your only option is to not leave him.

I know that may well seem impossible, but see if you can get creative about getting some help. Lots of owners think they can't do this, but they soon find ways to get company for their dog.

This doesn't always have to mean a professional dog sitter or daycare. What about retirees? Or students? Perhaps you have friends with kids who might be interested in trading some sits. Whatever you come up with, getting help will give you and your dog a much-needed break.

Then, you can gradually get your dog used to being on his own through desensitization training. Desensitization training works on the fear. And once the fear goes away, so do the prob-

lem behaviors associated with the fear. If somebody tells you there's another way to stop that barking today, don't listen.

What about Bark Collars?

Bark collar manufacturers make promises that their products will "Stop Barking Now!" and "Fast Results." But these devices are unregulated, so these companies can promise whatever they like.

What the marketing won't tell you is bark collars are what dog trainers call aversives. In other words, they frighten or scare the dog into changing his behavior.

But wait, I read bark collars just give the dog a static shock. That's what the marketers want you to believe. Sadly, they only work when they cause the dog enough pain—and they don't do anything to change the fear.

Let me share an example. Have you ever tried to give up your favorite candy bar or chocolate? Imagine you've said to me, "Julie, every time I go near chocolate, I need you to stop me."

I tell you every time you head to the kitchen for chocolate that you're going to get a static shock. It'll be the sort of static shock you get on a dry morning when you're putting on synthetic clothes. Is a static shock going to stop you from going for your favorite chocolate you haven't eaten for weeks and you're desperate for? Of course not.

But if I gave you a full-on electric shock, would that make you stop? I'm guessing it would. So, the static shock thing is a myth. The only ways bark collars and other shock devices change behavior are by inflicting pain and frightening your dog.

They might stop the behavior, but they don't do anything to make the dog feel better about being alone. He's going to be even more frightened when you go out, because now he not only has the fear of being alone, but he also dreads an electric shock if he dares to bark to tell you he's lonely.

Indestructible Crates

So-called indestructible crates are often marketed as anxiety crates and are promoted as a quick fix for separation anxiety.

They may well stop your dog from ripping up floorboards, but they will not stop his anxiety.

Even if the crate remains intact—I've seen these crates be destroyed just like ordinary ones—chances are your dog will either get physiologically or psychologically harmed.

What Can You Do Today?

First, don't feel bad about anything you've done up to this point, because you've been sold some very clever marketing. That's not your fault.

Then, get creative about finding help with your dog. Jump into my Facebook group, Dog Separation Anxiety Support. Reach out to people about what they've done to suspend absences. Ask what they've done to stop destruction and chewing in the home. And find out what they've done to handle neighbor complaints. That's your first step.

Next, start training. The sooner you start, the sooner your dog will stop being frightened by being on his own.

It's not going to be an easy journey, but it will be an incredibly rewarding one. To this day, when I leave the house knowing that Percy will just be curled up when I'm gone, it feels amazing. I don't think that will ever lose its charm.

Countless owners like you thought their dog would never get over it. And while there can never be any guarantee with behavior change, separation anxiety training does work for many, many dogs.

There is hope for you and your dog!

CASE STUDY

Jemma, Matt, and Gumbo

Proof There is Hope

Even after extensive research, preparation and training into raising a puppy, Jemma and Matt found that Gumbo (aka Bo) did not develop in the way that their groundwork suggested. Although he was certainly an energetic, vigilant dog (classic Vizsla), they didn't expect their efforts to get him comfortable when he was left alone to result in an anxious dog.

Bo didn't exhibit obvious signs of separation anxiety. So, after eight long months of searching and trying to understand what was going wrong, Jemma found my Facebook group and listened to my podcasts. This was the turning point—Jemma realized Bo did, in fact, have separation anxiety.

Jemma and Matt reorganized their life so they could ensure Bo wasn't alone. Jemma used all her precious vacation to stay home with Bo, and Matt worked from home whenever he could.

She booked a consultation with me, and during the video assessment, Bo flew to the door, whined and scratched in seconds. It didn't look good.

Jemma will admit that she's a pretty Type A, organized, and determined person. You don't have to be like this to succeed at separation anxiety training, but it definitely won't hurt. During our consultation, she took the most detailed notes and asked a considerable number of questions. I could tell she was on a mission!

Jemma's goal was for her and Matt to return to their normal working routine. For this to happen, Bo would need to handle six hours of alone time. That was a big ask for a dog who could barely do twelve seconds.

Jemma and Matt trained—a lot. During the early days, there were a few setbacks. Eventually, they had a breakthrough, and Bo began to handle longer and longer absences.

I started to get messages like this, "Hey, Julie. He just did an hour!" and "Oh my goodness, Julie, he has just done four hours!".

From there, Bo aced five hours and then six. I was so happy for Jemma and Matt. They got the six hours they needed and in four months were both able to get back to a normal routine. Bo would get plenty of exercise and enrichment before and after his alone time. And he spent his home-alone time snoozing on the sofa, with an occasional wander around the apartment. It was so lovely to see videos of this formerly stressed-out pooch now happily hanging out, while mum and dad were at work.

Jemma, Matt, and Bo are proof that there is hope for life after separation anxiety.

APPENDIX A

SAMPLE TRAINING PLANS

Here are some sample separation anxiety training plans you can follow. Remember to always work at your dog's pace and under your dog's anxiety threshold.

Each of these training plans is based on the assessment of your dog's tolerance to alone time. Don't use these plans sequentially. Once you have successfully completed the initial plan based on your dog's baseline assessment, write out the next plan for your dog. See page 130 for a reminder on how to do this.

(You can find PDFs of all these plans at www.berightbackthebook.com.)

Baseline Assessment: Less Than 30 Seconds

If your initial baseline assessment is less than 30 seconds, work on pre-departure cues or door desensitization training (see page 130).

Baseline Assessment: 30 Seconds

Drop any avoidable pre-departure cues (see page 99), step out of the door for the following durations, and return.

STEP 1	2 seconds
STEP 2	10 seconds
STEP 3	5 seconds
STEP 4	15 seconds
STEP 5	5 seconds
STEP 6	25 seconds
STEP 7	15 seconds
STEP 8	10 seconds
STEP 9	20 seconds
STEP 10	30 seconds

Baseline Assessment: 50 Seconds

Drop any non-avoidable pre-departure cues (see page 99), step out of the door for the following durations, and return.

STEP 1	10 seconds
STEP 2	5 seconds
STEP 3	30 seconds
STEP 4	5 seconds
STEP 5	25 seconds
STEP 6	10 seconds
STEP 7	15 seconds
STEP 8	20 seconds
STEP 9	10 seconds
STEP 10	50 seconds

Baseline Assessment: 1 Minute, 15 Seconds

Drop any avoidable pre-departure cues (see page 99), step out of the door for the following durations, and return.

STEP 1	10 seconds
STEP 2	5 seconds
STEP 3	10 seconds
STEP 4	2 seconds
STEP 5	20 seconds
STEP 6	25 seconds
STEP 7	15 seconds
STEP 8	35 seconds
STEP 9	20 seconds
STEP 10	1 minute, 15 seconds

Baseline Assessment: 1 Minute, 45 Seconds

Drop any avoidable pre-departure cues (see page 99), step out of the door for the following durations, and return.

STEP 1	5 seconds
STEP 2	15 seconds
STEP 3	10 seconds
STEP 4	30 seconds
STEP 5	5 seconds
STEP 6	15 seconds
STEP 7	45 seconds
STEP 8	20 seconds
STEP 9	10 seconds
STEP 10	1 minute, 45 seconds

Baseline Assessment: 2 Minutes, 15 Seconds

Drop any avoidable pre-departure cues (see page 99), step out of the door for the following durations, and return.

STEP 1	10 seconds
STEP 2	20 seconds
STEP 3	15 seconds
STEP 4	5 seconds
STEP 5	30 seconds
STEP 6	10 seconds
STEP 7	50 seconds
STEP 8	15 seconds
STEP 9	20 seconds
STEP 10	2 minutes, 15 seconds

Baseline Assessment: 3 Minutes

Drop any avoidable pre-departure cues (see page 99), step out of the door for the following durations, and return.

STEP 1	5 seconds
STEP 2	15 seconds
STEP 3	10 seconds
STEP 4	20 seconds
STEP 5	5 seconds
STEP 6	10 seconds
STEP 7	55 seconds
STEP 8	25 seconds
STEP 9	10 seconds
STEP 10	3 minutes

Baseline Assessment: 3 Minutes, 30 Seconds

Drop any avoidable pre-departure cues (see page 99), step out of the door for the following durations, and return.

STEP 1	10 seconds
STEP 2	25 seconds
STEP 3	5 seconds
STEP 4	20 seconds
STEP 5	10 seconds
STEP 6	25 seconds
STEP 7	15 seconds
STEP 8	35 seconds
STEP 9	20 seconds
STEP 10	3 minutes, 30 seconds

Baseline Assessment: 5 Minutes

Drop any avoidable pre-departure cues (see page 99), step out of the door for the following durations, and return.

STEP 1	10 seconds
STEP 2	5 seconds
STEP 3	25 seconds
STEP 4	30 seconds
STEP 5	10 seconds
STEP 6	15 seconds
STEP 7	20 seconds
STEP 8	1 minute
STEP 9	5 seconds
STEP 10	5 minutes

Baseline Assessment: 7 Minutes

Drop any avoidable pre-departure cues (see page 99), step out of the door for the following durations, and return.

STEP 1	10 seconds
STEP 2	20 seconds
STEP 3	5 seconds
STEP 4	1 minute
STEP 5	15 seconds
STEP 6	2 minutes
STEP 7	15 seconds
STEP 8	35 seconds
STEP 9	20 seconds
STEP 10	7 minutes

Baseline Assessment: 10 Minutes

Drop any avoidable pre-departure cues (see page 99), step out of the door for the following durations, and return.

STEP 1	5 seconds
STEP 2	15 seconds
STEP 3	3 minutes
STEP 4	10 seconds
STEP 5	5 seconds
STEP 6	20 seconds
STEP 7	1 minute
STEP 8	10 minutes

Baseline Assessment: 15 Minutes

Drop any avoidable pre-departure cues (see page 99), step out of the door for the following durations, and return.

STEP 1	10 seconds
STEP 2	25 seconds
STEP 3	5 seconds
STEP 4	3 minutes
STEP 5	20 seconds
STEP 6	15 minutes

Baseline Assessment: 20 Minutes

Drop any avoidable pre-departure cues (see page 99), step out of the door for the following durations, and return.

STEP 1	5 seconds
STEP 2	25 seconds
STEP 3	15 seconds
STEP 4	2 minutes
STEP 5	5 seconds
STEP 6	20 minutes

Baseline Assessment: 25 Minutes

Drop any avoidable pre-departure cues (see page 99), step out of the door for the following durations, and return.

STEP 1	5 seconds
STEP 2	1 minute, 30 seconds
STEP 3	5 seconds
STEP 4	1 minute

STEP 5	30 seconds
STEP 6	25 minutes

Baseline Assessment: 30 Minutes

Drop any avoidable pre-departure cues (see page 99), step out of the door for the following durations, and return.

STEP 1	10 seconds
STEP 2	45 seconds
STEP 3	5 minutes
STEP 4	30 seconds
STEP 5	30 minutes

APPENDIX B

ADDITIONAL TRAINING PLANS

THE MAGIC MAT GAME FOR HYPER-ATTACHED DOGS

The Magic Mat Game will teach your dog that it's way more rewarding to stay on his mat than to follow you around the house.

You will need:

- A mat that you'll only use for this training (and will put away when not training),
- Lots of great treats, and
- The training plan (outlined in this appendix) and the demo video (see www.berightbackthebook.com)

Here's how to go about it.

"Grading" Rules:

Work in sets of five tries.

- If your dog gets it right four or five times out of five, move to next step.

- If your dog gets it right three times out of five, repeat the current step.
- If your dog gets it right one or two times out of five, drop to the previous step.
- Always reward your dog in a down position. If he gets up when you're reaching for treats after a distraction, get him back into a down before giving him the treat.

The more you practice this, the more magic the mat will become. When you take out the mat, your dog will rush to it. This is because all that reward training you've been doing has made him associate the mat with treats!

Once this behavior is solid, you can start to take the mat on the road, which is great for trips to the vets, visiting friends, or even eating out (in places where that's allowed).

Here's the plan.

STEP #	WHAT DOG NEEDS TO DO TO EARN TREATS	# RIGHT OUT OF 5
1.	Hold a down for 1 second with a treat ~2 feet away from the dog at his nose level.	
2.	Hold a down for 3 seconds with a treat ~2 feet away from the dog at his nose level.	
3.	Hold a down for 1 second with a treat 2–3 feet away on the ground. (If he moves, cover or grab the treat so he can't pick it up.)	
4.	Hold a down for 3 seconds with a treat 2–3 feet away on the ground.	

STEP #	WHAT DOG NEEDS TO DO TO EARN TREATS	# RIGHT OUT OF 5
5.	(Stand on the other side of dog.) Hold a down for 1 second with a treat 2–3 feet away on the ground.	
6.	(Stand on the other side of dog.) Hold a down for 3 seconds with a treat 2–3 feet away on the ground.	
7.	Hold a down while you take 1 step to the side and back.	
8.	Hold a down while you take 2 steps to the side and back.	
9.	Hold a down while you take 3 steps around the dog and back.	
10.	Hold a down while you walk halfway around your dog and back.	
11.	Hold a down while you walk a full circle around the dog.	
12.	Repeat steps 7–11 in the other direction.	
13.	Hold a down while you walk 6 feet across the room, and return immediately.	
14.	Hold a down while you step to doorway, and return immediately.	
15.	Hold a down while you step out of the room into the hallway and return immediately.	
16.	Hold a down while you step out of the room and close door and return immediately.	
17.	Hold a down while you go into an adjoining room and return immediately.	

STEP #	WHAT DOG NEEDS TO DO TO EARN TREATS	# RIGHT OUT OF 5
18.	Hold a down while you go into an adjoining room and close door, and return immediately.	
19.	Hold a down while you step to doorway and return immediately.	
20.	Hold a down while you step out of room into the hallway and return immediately.	
21.	Hold a down while you step out of room and close door, and return immediately.	
22.	Hold a down while you go into an adjoining room and return immediately.	
23.	Hold a down while you go into an adjoining room and close door then return immediately.	

HOUSETRAINING 101 FOR PUPPIES

In Chapter 1, we talked about house soiling when a dog is left alone as a key sign of separation anxiety. Remember that house soiling is only considered indicative if it happens when you are out and at no other times, and when it happens in a dog who is otherwise housetrained.

You might discover that your dog's soiling isn't driven by anxiety and that it is, in fact, just a house soiling regression. Or your dog may still be a puppy and in need of a housetraining refresher.

If so, here's my housetraining 101 guide to help you tackle this most frustrating of problems.

Since it's aimed at non-anxious soilers, it assumes that the puppy is comfortable in a crate. If your dog or puppy hasn't yet learned to be comfortable in a crate, then first work on crate training.

Reminder: This advice is for non-anxious puppies! This approach will not work if your puppy is crate-phobic or is soiling because they panic when left.

You will need the following:

- A crate only large enough for your puppy to lie down comfortably stretched out,
- A schedule for going outside,
- Treats for whenever you go outside with your puppy,
- Good observing skills to prevent accidents, and
- Patience.

Step 1: Crate

Crate your puppy or dog whenever you're away or can't actively supervise (e.g., when you're busy around the house, sleeping, etc.).

This will make him hold on so that you can have success outside later. If your puppy's crate is too big, he may be tempted to soil in his crate. He can use one end as a bed and the other as a toilet. Puppies are almost more inclined to go in a dirty crate, so make sure you clean up any in-crate accidents.

Step 2: Determine a Schedule

Provide your puppy with a set schedule for eating and for going outside. If you are away for longer than four hours, have someone come to the house to take him out.

A typical puppy housetraining outing schedule looks like this:

- First thing in the morning and whenever your puppy wakes from a nap.
- After each meal. This is often when puppies will have a bowel movement. You will discover your own puppy's rhythm.
- Depending on the puppy's age, every 30 to 90 minutes.
    - » Take your puppy outside to the same spot each time so he begins to associate the area with its purpose.
    - » Don't interact with your puppy. Just let him get on with it.
    - » If nothing happens after five minutes, bring him back into the house and crate him for 30 minutes. Then try again.
    - » If he does eliminate, he may have a supervised free period in the kitchen or confinement area or, better yet, a nice walk. This acts as a bonus for performing.
- A very young puppy (6–8 weeks) may need to go out once during the night.

Step 3: Reward Generously

Every time your puppy eliminates outside, heap on the praise and a produce a favorite treat. If the praise makes him stop in the middle of eliminating, save it until just after he finishes.

Step 4: Hone Your Observation Skills

Puppies give signals prior to eliminating. If you learn your puppy's signals you'll catch far more would-be accidents before they happen. Common behaviors include circling, restlessness, and sniffing. Whenever you see these, take the puppy out! Have treats and his leash ready near the door.

Step 5: Don't Lose Your Cool

Most puppies will have accidents, especially in the beginning of training. Since your puppy will only be loose in the kitchen when he is "empty," mistakes will be seldom.

Supervise so you can take him out if you see him winding up. If you see him starting to eliminate, say, "Outside" and get the puppy there as quickly as possible. Don't shout at your puppy!

Stay outside for the five-minute period, and praise and give a treat if he finishes. If he doesn't go, bring him back inside and either supervise or crate him for another try later. Never punish, as this may inhibit your puppy from going in front of you. Punishment doesn't have to be physical. It could be a sharp word.

If your puppy has an accident in the house or in the crate and you did not see it happen, do not punish him. It won't work and it's cruel. Simply clean up the spot and apply a commercial odor neutralizer. Vow to supervise more closely in the future and/or add another trip outside to your schedule.

Housetraining Considerations

If you work long hours, try to find a dog walker who can take your puppy outside while you're at work. The more accidents he has, the longer housetraining will take.

If you are following the schedule and your puppy is still urinating several times an hour, take your puppy to the vet.

If your puppy is four months or older and still having accidents, my guess would be that he has too much unsupervised, loose time in the house. Remember that each time he goes in the house, he is being de-trained.

If your goal is for your puppy to go outside, paper training is unnecessary. If you have to leave him for extended periods when he will have no choice but to eliminate, laying down turf at one end of the kitchen (with bed and water at the other end) may help condition him to prefer a grassy surface.

CRATE TRAINING BASICS

This simple plan will help your dog or puppy to love his crate. Note that I strongly recommend that you don't crate your anxious dog when you are out.

Crates can be incredibly useful for lots of other situations, though, such as at groomer appointments or when you're traveling.

You need to know that dogs who have had bad experiences in a crate (which might be the vast majority of dogs with sepa-

ration anxiety) require a lot of time (and a lot of your patience) to warm up to a crate. But it can be done. I know because my dog Percy used to hate his crate. I worked this plan for six months, and now he happily sleeps in there at night. I still don't ever leave him in his crate when I go out, though.

What you will need:

- A crate that's an appropriate size for your dog (for more information on choosing a crate, visit www.berightbackthebook.com.)
- Yummy treats (lots of them!), and
- Tons of patience!

Be sure to review the grading rules on page 229 for details on how to move through this plan.

Phase I: Get Him Comfortable with Freely Entering the Crate

STEP #	WHAT YOU OR YOUR DOG NEED TO DO
1.	Leave crate door open and, randomly throughout day, drop treats at the back. » Keep going for 3 days until he charges in as soon as you open the crate door.
2.	Use a treat to lure him into crate, feed at the back (toss treat), let him exit at freely. » Move to step 3 when he does this 5 times in a row.
3.	Lure him into crate and continue the flow of treats (~1 second apart) as long as he stays in the crate. (Still let him exit freely.) » Move to step 4 when he will stay in the crate happily for 1 minute.

Phase I: Get Him Comfortable with Freely Entering the Crate

STEP #	WHAT YOU OR YOUR DOG NEED TO DO
4.	Point to crate to hand-signal him into crate and continue the flow of treats (~1 second apart) as long as he stays in crate. (Let him exit at will.) » Move to step 5 when he will stay in the crate happily for 1 minute.
5.	Point to crate to hand-signal him into crate and feed and continue the flow of treats (~2 seconds apart) as long as he stays in crate. (Let him exit at will.) » Move to step 6 when he will stay in the crate happily for 1 minute.

Phase II: Get Him Comfortable with You Closing the Door

(Use standard grading rules from page 229.)

STEP #	WHAT YOU OR YOUR DOG NEED TO DO
6.	Hand-signal him into crate, move door to half-closed, feed, let him exit.
7.	Hand-signal him into crate, close door, feed, open door, let him exit.
8.	Hand-signal him into crate, close door for 2 seconds, feed, let him exit.
9.	Hand-signal him into crate, close door for 3 seconds, feed, let him exit.
10.	Hand-signal him into crate, close door for 5 seconds, feed, let him exit.
11.	Hand-signal him into crate, close door for 10 seconds, feed, let him exit.

Phase III: Add Duration

STEP #	WHAT YOU OR YOUR DOG NEED TO DO
12.	Make crate very comfy with bedding, hand-signal him into crate, give stuffed Kong or other special chew object, close door, hang out next to crate reading or watching TV for 10 minutes, dropping treats in every 20–30 seconds. » Do this 4–5 times over 2 or more days. » Move to next step if he goes in without delay and displays no signs of distress when he's in there.
13.	Repeat step 12 at a different time but now occasionally get up and leave room. Return within a few seconds. » Do this 4–5 times over 2 or more days. » Move to next step if he goes in without delay and displays no signs of distress when he's in there.
14.	Repeat step 12 at a different time but now for 30 minutes and feeding less frequently (every couple of minutes). » Do this 4–5 times over 2 or more days. » From here you can increase duration as long as your dog displays no signs of distress when he's in there.

APPENDIX C

HOW TO CHOOSE A TRAINER YOUR FAMILY CAN TRUST

Hopefully this book has inspired you to start separation anxiety training, but perhaps you'd like to find a behaviorist or trainer to help you. If so, here's some advice for choosing a trainer you can trust.

It can be hard to know where to find the right trainer because, in most countries, dog training is an unregulated profession. Anyone can call themselves a dog trainer without an education or a license. Marc Bekoff, professor emeritus of ecology and evolutionary biology at the University of Colorado, calls this dog training's "dirty little secret."

WHY QUALIFICATIONS MATTER

I don't know about you, but I like professionals to be just that: professional. I wouldn't hire an electrician who wasn't certified. I'd take a dentist straight out of school over the guy who learned dentistry at the "school of life." Yikes!

Yet somehow, we don't demand qualified dog trainers. We allow ill-trained individuals to advise families about the pointy-toothed wolf-descendant who lives in our home. Luckily, a growing number of people think this is unacceptable.

I belong to the Pet Professional Guild. Members of this professional body are committed to using scientific training methods, based on positive reinforcement. We get results without scaring, harming, or forcing dogs. To us, it's important to invest time and money into becoming qualified trainers.

Smoke and Mirrors

Another commitment Pet Professional Guild trainers make is transparency. Some trainers hide behind confusing language and cover up their approach, but Pet Professional Guild members are up-front about what we will do to your dog.

A credible trainer will give you clear answers to any question you have. They should answer for you:

- What will happen to my dog when he does something right?
- What will happen to him when he does something wrong?

As Jean Donaldson of the Academy for Dog Trainers explains, "Demand to know what specific methods will be employed in what specific situations. Don't settle for smoke and mirrors."

If you don't get crystal-clear answers, or if something about the trainer doesn't seem right, don't hire them. Don't let claims on websites dazzle you, either. A trainer might say they use hu-

mane methods, but that could be spin. Ask them about the consequences your dog will experience.

Don't believe a trainer who tells you prong collars, shock collars, and leash-pops don't hurt your dog. They only work *because* they hurt. Watch out for the term *balanced trainer*, too. Balanced trainers use harsh, aversive methods of training, not just positive reinforcement. It's not as humane as it sounds.

Don't Settle

Hiring a dog trainer is a big decision. Don't be afraid to be picky and shop around. As Marc Bekoff says, "Choose a dog trainer as carefully as you would a surgeon."

APPENDIX D

ALTERNATIVE TREATMENTS FOR DOG SEPARATION ANXIETY

Lots of owners like to explore so-called alternative treatments for dogs. I've had almost no success with these with dogs I've worked with.

My concerns with natural remedies are that:

1. I've not seen the magical results so many products claim.
2. They aren't cheap, and I worry that owners get lured into wasting precious money and time on products that won't help.
3. Natural isn't always good. It's human nature to hold the (false) idea that whatever is natural cannot be wrong. Philosophers call this the "appeal to nature fallacy."

Cyanide, arsenic, asbestos, mercury, and lead are all natural—yet all of these can kill us. For a dog, chocolate can be a killer. In fact, the purer the chocolate and the higher the cocoa content, the more lethal it is to dogs.

And dogs are natural scavengers and will get into all sorts of things they mustn't. But we know scarfing the garbage isn't good for them.

When it comes to natural products for dogs, instead of saying, "It's natural, so it must be good," we should say, "It's natural, but is it any good?"

Let's look at the most common alternative therapies for treating separation anxiety.

Supplements

There are a number of products you can buy over the counter which contain supplements purporting to help alleviate separation anxiety. The most common supplements include:

L-Theanine is an amino acid derived from green tea. Research in both humans and dogs is limited but suggests it could be safe and may help.

Alpha-casozepine is a protein found in cow's milk. You can find it in a number of products. One study in dogs determined it to be as equally effective as selegiline in reducing anxiety in dogs. But again, there isn't a lot of research.

L-tryphtophan. Tryptophan does have a link to serotonin and is an essential amino acid that is found in turkey. Research about the benefits isn't conclusive.

Pheromones

Dog-appeasing pheromones are intended to simulate the pheromones released by a lactating mother. Pheromone-based products include diffusers, sprays, and collars. Some research has

been promising, though effectiveness is significantly impacted by following the precise instructions for use.

Some owners report success with pheromones. Others say they see no difference.

Wraps and Pressure Vests

There are a wide range of wraps and pressure vests on the market that all purport to calm your dog by applying pressure to their body. I've not seen these have much effect on dogs, but some people say they see benefits.

Many of these products come with a 100% money-back guarantee, so you can always try them if you're curious.

CBD Oil

CBD is derived from the cannabis plant. It contains less than 0.3% of the THC compound, which is responsible for making users feel high.

THC itself can be lethal to dogs in small quantities. But while there is limited research on the use of CBD for pets, initial findings look promising for epilepsy and arthritis. It may be some time before we know whether CDB works for separation anxiety and at what dose.

Lack of Testing and Regulation

On top of the logic fail that we're all guilty of that "natural equals good," my other concerns about alternative treatments are that:

- Some natural products require less testing than prescription medications, and manufacturers don't always need research to back up their claims.

- Prescription medications may get a bad rap, but pharmaceutical companies do have to prove the claims they make.

- Sourcing a consistent product can be a challenge. This is especially true of CBD oil. Many owners have reported to me that finding a brand they trust can be problematic. It's not like when you buy ibuprofen. You know that no matter where you get it from, the ibuprofen is the same product—and that that pill in your hand has gone through specific testing.

If you want to explore alternative treatments, do so knowing that many claims are untested. Always do your research and do inform your vet.

APPENDIX E

SOLUTIONS FOR BARKING

Dogs bark for many reasons, not just because they are unhappy at home alone.

Alarm Barking

An alarm barker is letting you know of a threat to your survival outside (such as the UPS guy!). It doesn't make sense to us, but to your dog it's high crisis.

Request Barking

Request barking is your dog's way of letting you know he wants something—and he wants it now. Typical requests are "I want a treat," "I need attention," "Let me out of the car immediately," and "I want to play with that dog over there!"

Spooky Barking

Spooky barking happens when your dog is uncomfortable about something he sees or hears. Your dog barks to let the scary thing know: "I'm dangerous! Don't come any closer!"

Bored Barking

Bored barking can happen if your dog doesn't get the exercise and enrichment he needs. Your dog is going mad from boredom. Barking is just something to do.

Anxious Home-Alone Barking

Dogs with separation anxiety can howl like lone wolves when they are on their own. And as you now know, this type of barking results from his fear or panic of being alone.

SOLUTIONS FOR BARKING

Watchdog or Alarm Barking

Train your dog to do something he can't do at the same time as bark. Good choices are getting him to fetch a toy, getting out your Magic Mat (see Appendix B) and asking him to stay on the mat for yummy snacks, and calling him away from wherever he's doing the barking.

You need to practice these without the doorbell or visitors first. Once he gets good at it, you can add in those. Don't worry if he doesn't get it the first time, every time.

See if you can get a friend or family member to pretend to be a visitor. This is an easy way to get lots of repetitions in.

Have a look at the Magic Mat Game in Appendix B. You can train your watchdog barker to go to his mat instead of barking.

Use Time-Outs

Time-outs can be effective for letting a dog know he needs to do less of something. And watchdog barking responds well to the signal a time-out sends.

Here's what you need to do: let him do a couple of barks, then ask your dog to be quiet ("Quiet please"). Don't shout or yell; you're not trying to scare him into stopping. "Quiet please" is a warning cue that you'd like him to stop or else risk being timed out.

If he doesn't stop, "mark" the behavior you didn't want. Again keeping it light, say, "Oh! Too bad!" or "You lose." Remove your dog to the "penalty area." Or if it's easier, just remove him from the window, so that he loses access to whatever he was interested in.

No rough collar grabs and drags! Move your dog calmly. You're not trying to scare him into stopping.

The time-out area should be a room that's away from the action. You could also use a crate, if you've followed the crate training plan. Do note that dogs with separation anxiety can find time-outs aversive though. If your dog goes over threshold when separated from you in the house, time-outs in a crate or other room shouldn't be used. Stick to removing him from whatever he was barking at.

Your dog will connect the behavior he was doing when you chirped, "Too bad!" with the time-out. Losing access to you, or to something interesting, is a big deal.

And so, your dog will start to choose not to bark. It might

take a few tries, but keep at it and be consistent. Use a time-out every time he doesn't comply.

You can make this even more powerful by rewarding him if he stops after the "Quiet please" warning. Remember to have those treats handy!

Request Barking

Dogs are brilliant behavioral economists. They excel at calculating how much effort to put into getting an outcome. If you ignore your pestering dog, he learns he is wasting precious energy. He gives up and saves his effort for something with better odds. If the dog could talk, we might hear him say, "This is dumb. I'm not getting anywhere!"

Letting your dog get on with the unwanted behavior can sometimes be a good strategy. The fancy trainer term is *putting the behavior on extinction*. It works like this: Your dog attempts the behavior and it doesn't work. He tries again. After seeing it doesn't work a few times, he gives up—eventually.

Although we can use "extinction" to our advantage, we must make sure our tactic doesn't backfire. If we're not careful we can make the behavior stronger.

If you give in when they bark, they quickly learn barking works. And the more it works, the more they use it.

You need to be as determined as your dog is. Stop rewarding unwanted barking with attention. Don't let him into the backyard if he's barking. Expect quiet before you let him out of the car at the park. Don't give in to barking at the dinner table.

Hold the line. If you crack, he gets rewarded—and he'll come back even more determined.

You may have been reinforcing his barking for a while by giving in. We've all been there! If so, expect his barking to get worse before it goes away. You've changed the rules, and your dog will be frustrated.

Remember, though, that letting a dog bark it out is not what to do with an anxious dog.

Bored Barking

In a natural environment, your dog would spend a lot of energy looking for food. Even if it seems like he already gets a lot of exercise, see if you can add some more. Here are some suggestions:

- Take slow walks. These give your dog an opportunity to catch up on the neighborhood smells. (Think of it as a "sniffari!")
- Play games with your dog. Most dogs can learn to love games, even if they're not tug or fetch maniacs. Hide-and-seek and nose work are great for scent-driven dogs.
- Get him off-leash with other dogs.
- Ditch the boring bowl and let him work for his food. He'll love doing this!
    - » Stuff a Kong and hide it in the house before you leave for work.
    - » Scatter his kibble in the grass in the backyard, or on an area rug inside.
    - » Use his kibble for training treats. (Training tuckers pooches out.)

- Stock up on his favorite chew toys.
- Teach him to find a toy that you've hidden and then celebrate his find with tug-of-war or fetch.

Spooky Barking

With spooky barking it's important to get at the underlying fear. You want to change how the dog feels about whatever is scaring him.

Whatever spooks your dog must become associated with food. Whenever the dog sees or hears something he's scared of, be ready with the best treat ever (chicken, beef, cheese, liver, hamburger—whatever he loves). You want him to start to associate the scary thing with best food ever.

Let him see whatever is spooking him, then have a chicken or beef party. Don't get too close to the scary thing, though. You risk making him worse if you do. You can tell you've gotten too close when he either won't take a treat or chomps your fingers off when he does. Try to avoid this.

Achieving Harmony

The key to a quiet life with a dog who doesn't bark all the time is to work out which type of barking you're dealing with, and then to tackle that barking using the suggestions in this appendix.

Remember that anxious barking—the type the dog does when he's panicking at home—can only be stopped once you stop the fear.

APPENDIX F

CONFIDENCE-BOOSTING TRAINING

Confidence in dogs is not a behavior trait. It's context-specific. That big, bouncy, forward dog who seems confident might freak at paper bags blowing in the wind.

Why is that? Well, when we think of confident people, we're really thinking of people with high self-esteem. We use the word *confident* to describe people who seem to be comfortable in a wide range of scenarios, especially social settings. But this is just self-esteem. Those people might have scenarios in which they feel uncomfortable. Confidence is context-specific for people, too.

Can We Boost Confidence in Dogs?

Yes. But just as with people, to teach a dog confidence we need to teach them confidence in a context. If you want your dog to be more comfortable around people with hats, you need to teach him confidence around people with hats.

Consider this example: Learning how to play tennis won't make you more confident as a public speaker. To be more confident speaking in public you might need to take presentation courses, work with a voice coach, or do some amateur dramatics.

As much as agility or foraging for his food will make your dog feel good, it won't help him feel more confident at home alone. He needs to learn confidence—and there are ways you can help him.

Rewards-Based Training

If you use rewards for training, you are rewarding dogs for getting the right answer. Dogs who are used to rewards-based training know that it's worth trying to do what you ask because:

- Something amazing might happen if they get the right answers, and
- Nothing bad will happen if they get the wrong answer.

It's wonderful to see dogs who have been reward trained react to a new training session. They respond with giddy excitement and anticipation!

Rewards-based training is the ultimate in giving dogs choice. They can choose not to do the behavior you've asked for. They can tell you when you've set the bar too high and it's stressing them. And they can choose to walk away when your training gets sloppy or you don't pay them fair wages for the work you've asked them to do.

It's the polar opposite of punishment training, in which the only choice the dog has is to try to work out what the trainer wants so that he can stop the pain and fear.

Play and Enrichment

Dog play, ball games, problem-solving, sniffing, working for food, tug-of-war, and anything that tires a dog out mentally or physically are all good for tackling separation anxiety. *But* these won't fix separation anxiety on their own, nor will they make a dog more confident on their own.

Play and enrichment are important to mental health. If an anxious dog's play and enrichment needs aren't met, our training methods can be undermined.

Socialization

Technically, when we talk about socialization, we're referring to a process that involves young puppies, typically up to 12–14 weeks old. When we socialize young puppies, we gently expose them to new experiences and create positive associations with those new experiences. This helps puppies be confident with whatever life has to throw at them as they mature.

However, while the socialization window closes as early as 12 weeks, that doesn't mean that we can't continue to help our dogs to have positive experiences.

To help a dog feel confident around different things in his life, we should always stick to these rules:

- Never push a dog into a situation in which he is uncomfortable. (You should be able to tell from body language or whether the dog willingly approaches a person or object.)
- Just as you do with desensitization training for separation anxiety, see if you can break new experiences into small, non-threatening steps.
- Aim to pair new or different experiences with something amazing (like chicken or cheese).
- When a dog seems uncomfortable, let him retreat. Always let him tell you whether he is okay.

These rules are especially important for helping a shutdown dog with general anxiety.

RESOURCES

Books

Marc Bekoff

Canine Confidential

Written by award-winning scientist—and lifelong dog-lover—Marc Bekoff, this book brilliantly opens up the world of dog behavior and helps us understand how we can make our dogs' lives the best they can possibly be.

Dr. John Bradshaw

In Defence of Dogs

Dr. Bradshaw's book overturns the most common myths about dogs' emotions and behavior and shows how we should really treat our pets.

Malena Demartini

Treating Separation Anxiety in Dogs

This groundbreaking book gave trainers tools and related strategies to help dogs overcome the fear of being left.

Jean Donaldson

Culture Clash: A Revolutionary New Way of Understanding the Relationship between Humans and Domestic Dogs

This book turned the dog-training world on its head and set up millions of dogs for a life free of punishment-based training.

Alexandra Horowitz

Inside of a Dog: What Dogs See, Smell, and Know

Alexandra Horowitz introduces us to dogs' perceptual and cognitive abilities, and then draws a picture of what it might be like to be a dog.

Patricia McConnell

The Other End of the Leash: Why We Do What We Do around Dogs

An applied animal behaviorist and dog trainer with more than 20 years' experience, Dr. McConnell looks at humans as just another interesting species, and muses about why we behave the way we do around our dogs, how dogs might interpret our behavior, and how to interact with our dogs in ways that bring out the best in our four-legged friends.

Articles

Dr. John Bradshaw
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The Guardian, July 2017

Mark Brown
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Websites/Online Communities/Blogs

Fearful Dogs Facebook Group and Blog by Debbie Jacobs
https://fearfuldogs.com/
https://www.facebook.com/groups/fearfuldogs/

Companion Animal Psychology Blog
https://www.companionanimalpsychology.com/

Pet Professional Guild
https://www.petprofessionalguild.com/

The Academy for Dog Trainers Blog
https://www.academyfordogtrainers.com/

Canine Enrichment Facebook Group
https://www.facebook.com/groups/canineenrichment/

Help with Managing Absences

Rover.com

A site in the United States and Canada with listings of professional dog walkers and dog sitters.

Borrow My Doggy

A UK-based site for matching your dog to dog lovers who will happily care for your dog for free.

Trusted Housesitters

A global site for peer-to-peer housesitting. (I swear by this site for my dogs.)

Online Training

Jean Donaldson
The Dog Training 101, The Great Courses

Step-by-step, field tested training plans will show you how to teach any dog—young or old, any breed or variety—basic obedience and to solve common behavior problems.

INDEX

D

E

F

G

H

I

K

L

T

U

V

W

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Julie Naismith helps owners and dogs around the world overcome separation anxiety and get their life back on track. While most dog professionals work across a range of cases, Julie is one of the few who focuses on a niche.

Julie's specialist knowledge means that she's come across hundreds of different separation anxiety cases and fully appreciates the nuances of this complex behavioral condition.

Julie acquired her skills and knowledge at the Academy for Dog Trainers, often referred to as the Harvard for dog trainers, where she was taught by world-renowned trainer Jean Donaldson.

Originally from Yorkshire, England, Julie now lives in the Canadian Rockies with her husband and three dogs.