

Patricia B. McConnell, Ph.D.



I'll Be Home Soon!

How to Prevent and Treat
Separation Anxiety

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Separation Anxiety

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Separation Anxiety

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*If you worry about leaving your dog home alone,
both because you love your dog and your house,
-this little book is for you.*

There he is, sitting at the window, looking for all the world like his heart will break if you drive away without him. And there you are, outside, on the other side of the window, feeling guilty about leaving, and praying that your house will be in one piece when you get home.

If you worry about leaving your dog home alone, both because you love your dog and your house, this little book is for you. Most dogs can be left home alone during the day and lead happy, fulfilled doggy lives without destroying your house. Some dogs get into trouble at home when you're gone because there's so much fun stuff to do without you to stop them. These dogs don't have a serious behavioral problem. Heck, they're not serious at all. They are too busy gleefully chewing on the couch to be serious, and after all, you're not there to stop them. Or they leave a deposit on the carpet because they're not house trained yet, or they bark all day because it's just something to do. (Sort of like watching the soaps, where nothing really happens but it's hard to stop anyway).

But a small number of dogs suffer from a serious problem, called Separation Anxiety, in which they panic at your departure and stay panicked until you return. They may soil the house, eat the window molding, howl in misery all day and/or pant, shake and drool entire lakes of scared doggy saliva. An actual case of full-blown Separation Anxiety is truly heart-rending, because the dog is in a

panic when you leave. This book is designed to help those of you whose dog really suffers from Separation Anxiety, to help any dog owner to prevent it from developing and to help you raise a dog with good "house manners". It can be tricky to determine if your dog has Separation Anxiety or just bad house manners, so read carefully to be sure which category describes your dog. What follows will help you to determine why your dog gets in trouble when you're gone and how to prevent trouble from happening again. Included is a discussion of how to handle both bad house manners and how to treat serious Separation Anxiety when it occurs.

SEPARATION ANXIETY - WHAT IT IS

Separation anxiety has gotten a lot of press lately, much of it associated with a medication that was recently approved for use in veterinary medicine to treat it. Regrettably, this attention to Separation Anxiety has not always been helpful. I read a newspaper article that defined Separation Anxiety as having a dog who chewed, barked or house soiled when you were gone. That would include about half the dogs in the United States. Don't get me wrong, it's not ok to have your dog chew or potty in the house, but just because they do doesn't mean that they have Separation Anxiety. They might be thrilled that you're gone so that they can finally get into the garbage. Many problems that owners have with leaving their dog home alone can be solved by knowing how to teach a dog to be polite while you're gone. This booklet has many tips for those of you whose dog doesn't have Separation Anxiety, but could use some coaching in good manners. It's important to first determine what's causing the problem.

Separation Anxiety in dogs is a serious emotional problem, where the dog becomes panicked when his owner leaves. Dogs with full-blown Separation Anxiety act as though they are in terror about your departure, and about being alone in the house while you're gone. There are many ways that dogs can express their panic at being left home alone, so the symptoms are highly variable. The most common are:

- Whining and pacing as you prepare to leave and/or long after you've gone

How to Prevent and Treat Separation Anxiety

- Dilated pupils
- Panting and/or drooling
- Sweaty pads
- Trembling or shaking
- Non-stop barking or howling while you're gone
- House soiling
- Destructive chewing or digging, especially around the entrances and exits
- Appetite suppression
- Desperate and often injurious attempts to get out of the house or crate

One of my clients had a dog who began to pace while she dried her hair in the bathroom, added in whining when she got dressed and had eyes the size and shape of pancakes when she picked up the keys. This poor dog barked and dug hysterically at the door jamb as soon as she left, completely ignoring the tasty goodies her owner had left out to distract her.

Sylvia the Shar-Pei ate the antique, irreplaceable French crocheted curtains, the molding around the windows and the doors, plus assorted blinds and hardware. Misty the Weimaraner not only howled operatically all day, she bolted through a glass window and redesigned her back with glass shards. Maggie the German Shepherd mix was crated to prevent destructive chewing, and was so stressed she darn near drowned in her own saliva.

There's no question that dogs can have strong emotions, and that some dogs behave as though they are in a state of terror when their owners leave.

Severe Separation Anxiety is similar to a panic attack in humans, and if you've ever had one, you'll be overwhelmed with sympathy for a dog with a severe case. The dog behaves as though she is terrified and in extreme cases will risk life and limb to find her owner or someone else to pack up with. Of course we don't really know what's going on in the mind of dogs with Separation Anxiety, and it can be dangerous to project our own emotions onto dogs. But there's no question that dogs can have strong emotions, and that some dogs behave as though they are in a state of terror when their owners leave.

WHAT CAUSES SEPARATION ANXIETY?

We don't know much about what causes Separation Anxiety and how it develops. Some authors claim that it's found in dogs with "over-attachment problems" to their owners. That well may be true, but some dogs exhibit the problems the first day their owners bring them home. I suspect that "Separation Anxiety" can be caused by a variety of issues, including "over-attachment", frustration intolerance and a true phobia about being alone. We really don't know, but I tend to think of each of these as somewhat different, and I think it might be helpful to ask yourself if you think your dog fits into one of these categories.

Personality

It is certainly true that some dogs are clingy and follow you around the house all evening. Some "velcro" dogs can't seem to get enough of you and insist on lying so that they're touching you all the time. It does appear that there are dogs who are predisposed to being distressed when you leave, while other happy-go-lucky types are comfortable as long as they have a comfy place to sack out.

There's even a plus side to the dogs that are a bit dependent. My dog Cool Hand Luke fits in that category: I simply don't remember ever having to call him back to me on a walk. While his cousin Pip is off sniffing for rabbits, Luke stays no more than 20 yards ahead of me. In other words, Pip's a perfectly normal dog, Luke is a little clingy. And, predictably, when I left Luke and Pip at a friend's house while I traveled, it was Luke who became anxious right after I drove away. Luke's daughter, Lassie, is just like her father. She turned around in mid-air the first time I asked her to come back to me, but she gets underfoot at home and has insured that I've never felt lonely in the bathroom since the day I got her. The down side of dogs who are so easy to keep with you on walks is that they might be more predisposed to be anxious when you're gone. Knowing that, I never would have tried leaving Luke and Lassie alone in new crates their first day in a busy, noisy studio when I arrived to begin taping a TV show. I spent five precious minutes on prevention, and saved myself hours of treatment.

The father-daughter example of Luke and Lassie suggests that there's a genetic predisposition to be susceptible to Separation Anxiety, but that doesn't mean that genetics are the only cause.

Any behavior of any dog is an integration of genetics and environment, and there is good reason to believe that some Separation Anxiety is related to a dog's experience.

Traumatic separation

Separation Anxiety appears to be more common in dogs who have had some trauma related to being left alone. We suspect it occurs in slightly higher than normal rates in dogs adopted from humane societies. You notice, I hope, my use of "suspect" and "appears". Although there hasn't been a lot of research on the cause of Separation Anxiety, one study from the University of Pennsylvania found higher rates of the problem in mixed-breed dogs adopted from shelters or found as strays than in dogs from other sources. (See McCrave 1991 for more information.) It's certainly reasonable to imagine that some dogs have learned reasons to be afraid of being left alone. The experiences that are likely contributing factors include being abandoned for days in a house with no food or water, tied to a tree and left to their own fate; or left in an unfamiliar place surrounded by unfamiliar barking dogs, who are all terrified themselves. There's no question that dogs can associate two events (perhaps your dogs are like mine and become extra clingy when you get out your suitcase), so it is reasonable to assume that some dogs associate your walking out the door with some terrible trauma. After all, until they learn to open doors themselves (ok, if your dog already can, skip to the Separation Anxiety treatment section!), dogs are helpless in the house. We know that having limited control over your environment is very stressful for many species, including humans and dogs.

Trauma while alone

Other good candidates for Separation Anxiety are dogs who have experienced something that scared them when you were gone. I had a client whose dog developed full-blown Separation Anxiety overnight. This German Shepherd cross was content to snooze all day long until one day, out of the blue, her owner returned to find a drooly, wild-eyed dog, a door recycled into toothpicks and a dozen lovely brown stains on her new carpet (why is it always new carpet?). It turned out that there had been a series of burglaries in the neighborhood that week. The owner and I both suspect that someone had tried to get into the house. Of course we'll never know why her dog developed Separation Anxiety overnight, but luckily she was successfully treated in about 12 weeks.

Sometimes symptoms that look like Separation Anxiety are simply reactions to other scary events. One dog was fine until her owner moved, but suddenly she began to shriek/howl all night long while the owner worked the late shift. Between howls, the dog found time to turn the doors into toothpicks. By the time she came to me she'd sacrificed one room to her dog, which looked like a tornado had hit. After a long talk it turned out that she had moved to a trailer with a metal roof, and the trailer was sitting right beside a huge power plant that generated electricity only during the nighttime hours. Stray voltage? Some terrible aversive noise only heard by doggy ears? Who knows, but the dog was fine if left in another house, so the "haunted house" hypothesis is a good one.

Another dog that I remember was perfectly comfortable as his owner left, but each day when she returned, the dog had defecated brown water puddles all over the house. Welcome home, having a good day? (Not any more.) This pattern really didn't fit classic Separation Anxiety symptoms because the dog seemed so relaxed when she left, so we tape recorded during the day and found out that 1) the dog was only upset in the afternoon and 2) the flight path of the local National Guard had changed, and every day around 2 pm the house was bombarded with low flying jets that rattled the windows and shook the walls. You can see that it's important to distinguish if there's some recurring event that's upsetting your dog, or whether there was an event in the past that is no longer happening that has set your dog off. Needless to say, you can't cure the dog if the same scary thing keeps happening while you're gone.

Dogs who've never been alone

Retired racing greyhounds are the King of this category (Queen, if you rescued a greyhound named "Sadie" or "Martha"). Racing greyhounds, and many conformation competition dogs ("show" dogs) have simply never been alone in their entire life. They've spent their life surrounded by other dogs in adjacent kennels, and while you may think moving them to a luxurious house is a treat, they're scared to death. Even dogs who've been re-homed from a household with another dog can have a hard time adjusting to being alone all day. The dogs with some of the worst problems I've encountered are dogs who have not only never been alone, but are kennel dogs who've been on a set schedule all day long. They become "institutionalized", in that they can't handle changes in

their routine. One silky sweet Greyhound that I worked with was just fine if her owner came home before 4 pm. But if she returned at 4:01, the dog lost it — she defecated all over the house and remained in a panic until her owner finally returned.

Separation Anxiety is rare

After reading about these cases, you might envision a country simmering with panicked dogs. Don't. True Separation Anxiety in dogs is rare, and before you begin to treat the problem, your first job is to figure out what's really wrong with your dog. I saw an eight month old Labrador recently that had been put on medication for Separation Anxiety. Seems he chewed on the couch when left alone all day while his owner was at work. Was he stressed when she left? Nope, he joyfully said goodbye and chewed on his toys. Any sign of stress when she returned? Nope, he was sleeping soundly on the couch when she got home after her nine hour day. Any chewing or digging by the doors or the windows where he could watch her walk away? Nope, just the couch. Diagnosis? A serious case of normal adolescent dog behavior. So it's appropriate to talk about what Separation Anxiety isn't, lest you go to sophisticated conditioning procedures and/or powerful medications for normal dog behavior that just requires some training.

True Separation Anxiety in dogs is rare, and before you begin to treat the problem, your first job is to figure out what's really wrong with your dog.

SEPARATION ANXIETY - WHAT IT ISN'T

If your dog begins to look terrified when you get ready to go out, if she won't eat a piece of steak that you leave by the door, if she howls, digs and chews all day while you're gone, if she's made desperate attempts to get out through the door or window, and is found at night in a puddle of saliva, don't even bother reading this next section! Your dog probably has Separation Anxiety. (Before going directly to the Treatment section, read about Prevention first, it has some ideas that might help.)

On the other end of the continuum, medicating an eight month old Labrador for chewing on the couch when left alone all day is

akin to doing surgery on a five year old child because he got rowdy in a restaurant. Most problems that owners have with their dogs when they're home alone are simply bad habits. So unless your dog has spelled it out in refrigerator magnets for you, read this list of troubles that can be caused by things other than Separation Anxiety:

Does your dog urinate or defecate in the house?

Well, she might because she's stressed and anxious, but she might because she has to relieve her bladder, and hey, you're not there to stop her, so why not!? Perhaps she learned originally to go on the newspaper by the door. Regrettably, lots of dogs learn not only to go ON the paper, but to go IN the house when they're "paper trained".

Do you feed free choice? If food doesn't go in on a regular schedule, it doesn't come out on one either. I've had many clients whose dogs snacked and nibbled, and then had to go before their owners came home to let them out on those days when they've eaten more than usual. Did you just switch foods, or maybe give Fido a whole bunch of leftovers last night? At times dogs defecate in the house because they physically can't control themselves. Some become such nervous wrecks over the possibility that their owners are going to come home and get angry at them again, that they actually begin to defecate out of fear of the approaching owner. Grabbing your dog's collar, shaking him, yelling and dragging him to a pile of feces is a great way to teach him to eat feces compulsively.

If your dog urinates or defecates in the house and shows no other signs of anxiety about your departure or while alone, I strongly suggest that you ask yourself if your dog is really house trained. Covering when you come home after they've had an accident does NOT mean that your dog is house trained. It means that he's appeasing you to deflect your wrath. It has nothing to do with the act of actually depositing that "stuff" in the house, it has to do with greeting you when you come home if that "stuff" is hanging around somewhere in the other room. Try going back to house training basics. Take your dog out as often as possible, go outside with him and give him a treat just as soon as he's pottied, and put him on a regular feeding schedule. Perhaps you might switch to a food that's not too rich - some of the "quality" dog foods go gal-

loping through Ginger's digestive system like grass through a goose. If your dog isn't yet house trained, you would do well to confine her to a small area of the house. If you want some tips, turn to the Prevention Section in this booklet. If your dog was doing well and then regressed, your dog might have a physical problem. If so, or if your dog seems especially difficult to housebreak, call your veterinary clinic right away.

Does your dog chew or dig while you're gone?

Dogs do not define chewing on your pillows as a problem. An owner watching TV instead of playing outside with him is a problem to a dog. An owner not understanding why he can't leave that dead squirrel carcass right away, just 'cause someone called "come"? Now that's a problem to a dog. But chewing? Hah! Oh the joy of it, especially those marvelous items full of stuffing that you get to extract, piece by glorious piece, ever so gently with your teeth. I'll bet Chief just can't wait for you to go so he can get started again.

My Border Collie Pip can't wait for my truck to pull out of the driveway, so she can fulfill her wildest dreams and launch herself onto the freezer and finish the cat food. Her only anxiety is whether I'll remember to pick up the cat food or not. I can just imagine her thoughts: "Oh good, good, she's moving faster like she does when she's in a hurry, oh goodgoodgood! She dropped something, that'll make her even later. Look, look, she's putting on her coat and getting her keys — could it be?, will she forget?, oh please please let her forget. OH NO! She's turning around, oh nooooooo. She picked up the bowl and put it away. Sigh."

So be careful of turning plain old chewing into a diagnosis for Separation Anxiety. Most "destructive" behavior in the house is simply your dog's version of entertainment. Chewing that suggests Separation Anxiety occurs mostly in areas where you come and go. Dogs with Separation Anxiety usually chew on doors, door knobs, door frames, window moldings and/or carpet by those areas. Of course, they don't read booklets on how they're supposed to behave, so there are exceptions. Misty the Weimaraner would leave the door and windows alone and go pull things off the kitchen counters. You'd have thought she was just messing around, if it wasn't for her pitiful howling and her alarming tendency to go through glass windows.

Does your dog bark or howl?

There are a lot of reasons to bark or howl, if you're a dog. First, there's that pesky squirrel that keeps taunting you outside the dining room window. No self-respecting dog is going to put up with a big rude rodent without standing up for herself. Then there are those endless joggers, dog walkers, and throaty trucks that charge into the territory and require a good warning challenge. And, since barking obviously works (they left, didn't they?), Queenie will bark even harder the next time. Howling communicates with other dogs far away, or possibly human "pack members" who've been gone "too long".

Other dogs might have learned to bark to get their owner's attention (did you train your dog to bark when he wants to go out?), so why wouldn't they bark if they want something? Think of it as "Hey, dude!" or "Open the door, frito breath." It doesn't mean that they are necessarily anxious, they've simply learned that barking gets your attention and what they want. They want something, so why not bark? Some dogs can bark repetitively with as little arousal as you might experience while absentmindedly chewing on your nails.

In other words, dogs who bark during the day when you're gone often do it for reasons other than Separation Anxiety. If your only problem is that your dog barks all day you'd be wise to consider many other alternatives first. I'll talk about ways to keep your best friend quiet when she's home alone later in the booklet.

Frustration Intolerance Might Be a Factor

Repetitive barking brings up another issue related to Separation Anxiety, which is whether your dog is behaving inappropriately in the house while you're gone because of frustration intolerance. Some experts in animal behavior (me included) suspect that some of the dogs seen for "Separation Anxiety" aren't so much anxious about being alone, but are agitated because they can't handle not getting what they want. I see some dogs in the office that seem to fall apart when they can't get what they want, looking like a two year old who's turning blue because he dropped his ice cream cone and can't stop crying. Part of maturing is learning how to cope with frustration, and I think a lot of our pet dogs haven't mastered that yet. We'll talk about how to deal with this under both the Prevention and Treatment sections that follow.

Regardless of the exact reason for a dog's internal strife, many of them bark repetitively when they are frustrated or afraid. Many animals repeat a behavior over and over again — think about a lion pacing in a cage at a old fashioned zoo. Those repetitive actions, called stereotypies, have been found to act like mild sedatives by causing the release of neurochemicals that can affect an animal's emotional state. Thus actions like pacing, nail chewing and possibly repetitive barking tend to soothe or calm the animal who is doing it. Certainly most of these behaviors are done when the animal (or human!) is mildly stressed, anxious or frustrated. If your dog is a barker, ask yourself what your dog gets for barking when you're home, and whether your dog has learned to expect to get what she wants when she wants it! Keep your answers in mind as you read through the booklet and customize your own plan.

PREVENTING SEPARATION ANXIETY AND RE-MODELED HOUSES

Insuring Your Dog is Safe and Comfortable in the House and that your House Is Safe and Comfortable Outside Your Dog!

Maybe you have a new dog that you're not sure you can leave alone. Perhaps your dog occasionally chews when you're gone, and you're not sure why. You might be in the situation in which I found myself — needing to leave your dog in a new place without a lot of time for them to get used to it. Perhaps there is reason to think that your dog has an early very mild case of Separation Anxiety. If so, read the following ideas and exercises that you can do to insure a stress free departure and a happy homecoming. Some of these ideas are also relevant if your dog has full-blown Separation Anxiety, so read this section even if you're far beyond prevention!

Quiet but Loving Comings and Goings:

It's easy to emotionally overload our dogs when we come and go, but it does them no good. What are they to make of your dramatic return if you throw yourself down and hug them as though you've just escaped death? Probably just that. "Good grief it must be dangerous out there! Look at her! She's acting like she thought she'd never get home!" So avoid the histrionics when you come home, open the door, say a quiet loving hello to your dogs and then get on with your life. I know, I know. . . really I do. That sounds so cold and unemotional. But is it really? Don't you greet the people that you truly love with warmth and affection without trying out for an opera?

You can be loving and truly happy to see your dogs without being overly dramatic about it. When I come home I look each one of my dogs in the eyes, saying "Hi, Luke", "Hi, Pip", "Hi Lassie", "Hi Tulip" as I touch each of their chins in our ritual greeting ceremony. As I say "hi", I am full of how very much I love them and how glad I am to see them, but I'm not an emotional tornado. I try to smile with my whole face, and speak with a warm loving voice, acknowledging each of them fully. It just doesn't take very long, and it's not very dramatic. I don't think histrionics make your dog feel more loved. They just up the arousal level, and might create an emotionally overloaded dog who starts chewing on the couch five minutes before you are expected home.

You can be loving and truly happy to see your dogs without being overly dramatic about it.

Keep your leavings low-key as well. I used to feel overwhelmed with guilt as I left my dogs. "I'm sorry", I'd say. "Poor babies, I'll be home as soon as I can." They'd look out the window with their huge liquid brown eyes, looking for all the world like orphans abandoned in an earthquake. Then two things happened. A friend of mine, who's a professional dog trainer, was with me when I left one day and listened quietly for a minute while I whined about how awful I felt to leave my poor dogs all alone all day long. And then she said: "Let me get this straight. You're going to work all day long at a difficult, stressful job that requires driving through snow, ice and lousy traffic just to get to. You're going to do this to make the money to afford the warm, comfy, food-filled home that

your dogs are now enjoying. No doubt they are now curled up on the couch, can drink clean fresh water when thirsty, and snack on food that is higher quality than the food most humans eat. And YOU feel guilty! They should be apologizing all over themselves when you leave, not you!” Hummm, a different perspective entirely!

Secondly, I tape recorded *my* dogs once right after I left. As soon as my car disappeared, the dogs began their own routine. One went to check on the cat food, one curled up on the couch, and another settled down for a nice nap. Meanwhile, I was driving down that icy snowy traffic-filled road, anxious about my day as a hard working graduate student.

So now I leave with another low key ritual. After making sure they have fresh water, picking up the cat food (usually!) and shutting the door to my bedroom, I pick up my bags and say: “OK, guys, go to work now. Be good.” And I mean it. I’ll be good at my job if you’ll be good at yours — and your job is to curl up and nap, chew only on your own toys, be polite to each other and squeeze your furry little legs together until I get home. It’s amazing the difference it’s made in how I feel when I leave; such a small change has decreased my own anxiety over leaving!

That’s fine for me, and maybe you too, but will this help your dog be less anxious about you leaving the house? We can only speculate, but most applied behaviorists agree that if the owner is highly emotional or anxious about coming and going, pets may pick up on that emotional energy. That generalized arousal might lead to a pet that has a harder time about being left alone for awhile. I think there’s good reason to suggest that we all stay relatively calm when leaving and returning, simply because your behavior might signal whether it’s a big deal or not.

Remember, I’m not saying to be cold and unloving when you come or go. There’s a clear distinction between love and warmth vs. dramatic high-arousal displays. They both have their place — just be thoughtful about it, and consider saving the wild silly antics for later.

Follow a “Leader of the Pack” program

Teaching your dog to see you as a benevolent leader won't cure Separation Anxiety, but I suspect that it can prevent some cases of frustration intolerance and a kind of generalized anxiety where dogs never quite relax. Just yesterday two clients raved to me about how much happier and more relaxed their dogs seemed since they followed the suggestions in a “leader” program. I see a lot of dogs in my office who seem intolerant of not getting anything they want. They whine and fuss if they aren't allowed to sniff, they demand to get up in owner's laps, or they bark in frustration at the toys on the shelf. My “favorite” case was a Cocker spaniel who alternated between looking at a toy in the toy basket and looking at his owner. The owner started to retrieve the toy for him (which he could have taken it out easily himself.) When I suggested the owner stay put, the Cocker began to bark at her, gradually increasing the intensity of his woofs until he began to growl/bark and charge at her. It appeared as though her lack of attention to his desires was just more than he could handle. He continued to work himself up into a frenzy until I intervened.

Following a “leader” program (also called a status reduction program) is NOT about being mean or cold to your dog. It's about benevolently setting boundaries and joyfully teaching your dog to learn delayed gratification. The basics are simple: don't cater to your dog just because she's cute, rather expect her to be a responsible polite member of the family. Polite family members don't knock you over going out the door, don't continually beg and paw for attention, don't invade your personal space no matter what's happening and don't insist that you give them massages anytime, anywhere on demand. The bottom line is to learn exercises that use positive reinforcement to teach your dog to enjoy being polite (uh, sort of like raising children, hey?)

Don't cater to your dog just because she's cute, rather expect her to be a responsible polite member of the family.

House train your dog

It's simple, at least if you're not the one who has to go outside every fifteen minutes in January. Take your dog outside as often as you can stand to (three times an hour when they're a pup, once an hour if adult) and give them a treat just as their little behind comes up. Don't wait until they trot back to the house while you stand

on the porch in your slippers. Then they're getting the treat for coming back to the house, not for going potty outside. Don't let them out of your sight in the house if they're puppies or new to your house (repeat after me: "I will not let my dog out of my sight for one second, I will not . . ."). If they scoot down the hall and urinate in the guest bedroom when you're not watching I want you to roll up a newspaper and hit yourself on the head with it, saying "bad human, bad human." That was your mistake, not theirs. And be sure to take them out often in the morning. I've talked to many people who took their dog out once in the morning and then left for work, and then returned to unwelcome gifts on the carpet. Most dogs seem to need two shots at it in the morning, including my own dogs.

If they only go outside and you don't give them the freedom to have "accidents" in the house, then voilà, you've got a house trained dog. When you're gone your dog should be in a crate or small area where a mistake won't cause much trouble, and where most dogs will quickly learn to avoid soiling if they can possibly help it. If you do see your dog start to go in the house, startle them out of it as quickly as you can with a quick loud noise (slap the wall, say AH!, throw an empty pop can so that it lands beside them and startles them) and take them outside. Avoid yelling and running full tilt toward them: Being loud and scary doesn't teach them anything except that you might be dangerous. Rubbing their nose in it teaches them to eat feces, or that you are a psycho person, so interrupt them but don't terrify them.

Think your dog is house trained because she covers when you come home and she's gone on the carpet? Think again. Go back up to the section "Separation Anxiety" - What it Isn't" and read it carefully, because punishing your dog when you come home for a house training problem doesn't help, but just might do a lot of harm.

Teach Your Dog What To Chew On

Dogs chew, that's what those beautiful long muzzles are for. You can't take away an activity that they'd spend hours performing every day in the wild and then complain that your dog is misbehaved. Some dogs don't read the books and ignore all chew toys, (especially expensive ones) but most dogs simply can't stop their mouths from working on something. Of course the younger the dog the

harder it is for them to inhibit themselves and the more chewy they are. Dogs use their muzzles in many of the same ways that you use your hands — imagine trying to keep your hands still all day long.

Your job is not to prevent chewing, it's to direct it to the appropriate place. The easiest way to do this is to start your dog chewing on hollow toys that have been stuffed with some wonderful tasty snack. That directs their attention immediately to where you want it, and gets them in the right habit. My favorites are Kongs®, Sterile Beef Bone, Goodie Ships®, and Buster Cubes®, all of which can be stuffed with some soft food that keeps your dog's attention longer than a regular chew toy. (Some dogs have no trouble with Sterile Beef Bones, but they are very hard, and although I've used them for over 15 years with no problems, some dogs can crack their teeth on them. Talk to your vet about his or her experience.) Meanwhile, spray inappropriate items with Bitter Apple® or Protex, both of which have bitter tastes that most dogs (sigh, not all) don't like. Follow the instructions below about how to decide where and when you can safely leave your dog during training.

*Your job is not to prevent chewing,
it's to direct it to the appropriate place.*

Teach Your Dog to be Comfortable in a Crate or Kennel

The benefits of being able to crate or kennel your dog are many. Confined dogs can't have an "accident" on your new carpet. (I love that use of the word "accident". What are they saying when they pee on your floor? "Oh dear, my urine fell out?") Confined dogs are not thrashing around on your couch barking out the front window, nor are they ingesting your Aunt Sally's antique rocking chair. Since a lot of good behavior results from the establishment of good habits and the prevention of bad ones, crate training your dog can prevent some pretty horrific problems down the road. So whether you've gotten a new pup, adopted a dog from the Humane Society or just want to be able to travel with your dog, teach them to be comfortable in a crate or small kennel. I use the word "crate" loosely — any small area where your dog is comfortable and can't get into a lot of trouble will do — from crates, to kennels to small rooms.

The only exceptions are dogs who are already phobic about being confined in a crate or small place. Regrettably, this can be com-

mon in dogs with full-blown Separation Anxiety. Perhaps they began to associate the crate with the fear that they feel when alone. Who knows, maybe there are dogs out there like me, with some canine version of claustrophobia. (Of course dogs are den animals, but they don't all read the books.) I have seen several dogs who were fine in the house, but in a physiological panic if confined to a crate. So if your dog hides when it's time to put her in the crate, begins to pant or salivate as soon as she's inside, resists going in or becomes aggressive in a desperate attempt to stay out of the crate, you simply have to find another way to house her. If this describes your dog, take heart, we'll talk more about what to do in the Treating Separation Anxiety section. Keep in mind, though, that most dogs adore their crates. Pip is sleeping in one right now, even though it's not hers and she could be on the couch!

As long as you make the time, it's easy to "crate" train your dog. All your dog needs to learn is: crate = feeling good. To make that association, be sure that you understand that an emotion can be linked with a location or context (like being in the crate when my owner leaves) in very few repetitions, in a very brief period of time. This is both your best friend and your worst enemy. It'll come back to bite you if you put your dog in an unfamiliar crate "just for a minute", listen to him bark and then return and let him out. So what did Fido learn if you do that? "I got shoved in this weird unfamiliar place, my owner deserted me, I barked in panic, and thank heavens I did, because she heard me and came back and let me out of that nightmare. Next time I'll bark louder and maybe she'll get me sooner". But what if you spent that same minute playing the "crate game" instead, and tossed tasty treats into the crate five times so that your dog got to love walking in and out of the crate. Now your dog has learned that the crate is a fun place to go into, because when he does, only good things happen.

All your dog needs to learn is: crate = feeling good.

The routine, then, is simple. Play the "crate game" by having your dog go in and out three to five times one evening, then repeat the game for a few sessions over the next day or two. (Remember that when I use the term "crate", I mean any small area, including kennels and laundry rooms.) Be sure not to shut the door at first, just let your dog go in and out. Once your dog consistently charges happily into the crate, begin to swing the door shut for just a sec-

ond after she enters. After a few more sessions of that, toss in a treat, shut the door, leave it shut and feed the dog through the gate. Now they've willingly gone into the crate, discovered that the door was shut and have still had a great time.

After a week or so of several sessions a day, start leaving the dog in the crate with a stuffed Kong® or Sterile Beef Bone that will keep him busy. Be sure some tasty gooey wonderful treat is inside that he wants to get out. Once he's busy discovering how far out his tongue will go, you walk away for thirty seconds. Come back BEFORE he's done with his stuffed toy, open the door, say "hi" quietly and take away the toy. Now your dog is learning: "Oh boy, she's going to go and I'll get my peanut butter surprise, oh boy oh boy, I wish she'd hurry up and go." Followed by: "Oh shoot, she's coming back, well heck, I'm not done yet, how come she came back so soon!"

All you need to do now is gradually increase the amount of time that your dog is left alone in the crate. Pick a time when Lucky is most likely to nap after she finished mining the goodies out of her toy, and you can start leaving her for longer and longer periods of time. In the simplest of equations, do several repetitions of each of the following intervals: Leave your dog for one second, two seconds, five seconds, ten seconds, 30 seconds, one minute, three minutes, five minutes, 15 minutes, 30 minutes, one hour, two hours, three hours and on to however long you need to confine your dog. Keep in mind that I just made those numbers up. So much depends on how your dog is responding it is very difficult to come up with a formula for everyone. Most importantly, remember that you need to spend the most time on the earliest stages (which is great, since it's so easy to do).

There is a downside of crates. I see far too many dogs who spend all day and all night in a crate, and I think that's a shame. Crates are great when you're raising a pup, settling a dog in a new environment, but unless you have some serious behavior problem you're working on, they are rarely necessary when you're home at night once your dog is mature. And most adult dogs can be allowed to be loose in the house during the day, especially if you've started them off right by not letting them learn bad habits.

Loose in the House?

Most of us would like to leave our dog out of a crate and loose in the house. The question, of course, is when is it safe to start trying? We'll talk about that soon, but first I want you to think about exactly where you think your dog would be happiest when you're gone. Sometimes, surprisingly, a dog is better off if she doesn't have access to the whole house. Some dogs thrive with free access to any room, but I suspect that others feel more secure if they are confined to only part of the house. I think that this is especially true of territorial or protective dogs, who behave as though they are on sentry duty when you're gone. Dogs vary on this a great deal, just keep in mind that looking out the window isn't always the best thing for your dog, especially the windows that look out onto the street by the front door . . . "Ok, they all left and I'm on sentry duty. Oh my, what a huge responsibility. Uh oh! What was that? BARK BARK BARK BARK BARK?". . . etc. You get the idea. Consider that your dog might do best initially crated and then eventually loose in several rooms, but not necessarily the whole house.

So how DO you decide when to start leaving your dog out of the crate? The first one to consider is the age of the dog. Leaving an adolescent anything (fill in the species) home alone in a big house is a prescription for trouble. Young dogs don't have any more emotional control than young children, and it's just not fair to leave a young dog in the middle of a candy store and not sample the wares. So how young is young? As always, it depends. (My friend and herding dog coach extraordinaire, Beth Miller, says she wants to write a book titled "It Depends", because it's the right answer to every question about dog training.) "Young" partially depends on the breed, because some dogs mature sooner than others (especially the smaller breeds), while some stay puppy-like and foolish for two and a half to three years. If your dog is a typical retriever, then don't even think about giving them full access to the house until they are over two or two and a half years old. Retrievers were bred to obsessively pick things up in their mouth and then not drop them. Active herding breeds like Border Collies, Heelers and Australian Shepherds are in overdrive for a couple of years, and if you don't give them something to do, no problem. They'll find something themselves. Since you haven't taught them chess yet, they well might be ingesting your antique coffee table.

I see a number of clients, by the way, who optimistically leave their young pups alone with no problems until the pups are about five to six months of age, and then return to disaster one night. These are often the people whose dogs get incorrectly diagnosed with Separation Anxiety, because they were fine for awhile, and then started destroying the house “out of the blue.” But lots of dogs become more active chewers in early adolescence. Teething usually begins around four and a half months or so, and we all know that leads to lots of chewing. Dogs, much like their human compatriots, go through developmental stages that include changes in behavior, and adolescent dogs are more than “full of themselves.” They seem to be bursting out of their own skin, so don't presume that your mellow little terrier puppy will be fine when she's seven months old in the house, even if she's been problem free up to then.

Exceptions? Of course. Prove me wrong, I'll love it. You bet that there are those marvelous dogs out there who've been alone all day long in the house since they were three months old and never touched a thing or pottied in the house. These dogs should receive medals in some awards ceremony somewhere, but don't expect your dog to win one just because you love him so much.

I like to confine a pup to a kennel, crate or small simple room until they are six months or so (if I'm not there to watch them.) Depending on age, breed, personality of the individual dog, time of day and energy of the pup at the time, I'll start letting a pup be alone in at least part of the house for a minute or two around six months of age. Perhaps I'll walk down to the mailbox, or go outside to feed the birds. While I'm gone, I'll leave a stuffed toy (Kong®, Sterile Beef Bone, Goodie Ship®, Buster Cube®, etc.) for the pup to work on. In my humble opinion, stuffed hollow toys are a much more important invention than automobiles or airplanes. Young dogs can't sit and be quiet on command for long periods of time any more than little kids can, but just like children, they can stay busy playing with toys. If the toy has food inside that the dog has to work to get out, you're not just keeping your pup out of trouble, you're teaching her to play appropriately.

Assuming I returned from my short trip to an intact house and a polite puppy, I gradually extend the period of absence. Perhaps you can leave your adolescent for an hour from 3 pm to 4 pm

when you go to the market on Saturday. You know they usually nap then, they've been exercising all day, you've just taken them outside to potty and you've left them with three different stuffed toys. But I wouldn't leave that same dog for an hour from 6 pm to 7 pm, the time that the dog expects a walk and a lot of exercise. Gradually extend the amount of time that you leave your dog, insuring that he's been well exercised, has had many chances to potty, is comfortable being alone and knows what to chew on.

Exercise

Getting more exercise will NOT cure Separation Anxiety, but it sure can protect your house from a bored dog who's on the prowl for something to do. In some cases it might indirectly help with a Separation Anxiety case: We know that exercise is a good way to positively affect mood in humans and most probably in dogs as well. No matter what your circumstance, you and your dog will both be healthier and happier if you get out and start moving around. Keep in mind that a short leash walk around the neighborhood exercises your dog's nose more than anything else. Your dog needs to RUN, so play ball in the backyard (or even the house), find a buddy for her to romp with, go to a dog park and go exploring, find a tennis court where you can let her off leash, and let her stretch out her beautiful legs. If there's nowhere that she can run off leash that's safe, then take long fast leash walks. And don't be surprised when your eight month old Australian Shepherd runs for two hours, naps for a half hour and wakes up looking for something to do. That's what she was bred for. She'll be overflowing with energy until she's at least three, so find some way for her to tire herself out. (Don't look at me, I didn't tell you to get a working dog!) But do remember, dogs with full blown Separation Anxiety are not bored, they're terrified (or perhaps crazed with frustration) and no amount of running yourself ragged is going to fix that.

*Getting more exercise will NOT cure Separation Anxiety,
but it sure can protect your house from a bored dog
who's on the prowl for something to do.*

TREATING SEPARATION ANXIETY

If you are sure that anxiety is what's driving your dog's inappropriate behavior, your job is to teach your dog a new reaction when you walk out the door. Imagine your dog being as excited as my dog Pip is when I leave for work: "Oh boy, oh boy, there she goes, maybe I can steal the cat food again." Rather than being overwhelmed with dread, your dog can be at least mellow about your departure, and possibly even downright pleased. What's critical is to be clear that you are trying to influence your dog's emotions, rather than training your dog to perform an obedience exercise. It's your dog's anxieties that create the problems, so it's the internal state of the dog you need to work on. Keeping that in mind, follow the steps outlined below.

1. Never correct destruction or accidents after the fact.

Sure she looks guilty when you walk in the door and the kitchen has been remodeled. But that doesn't mean that she "knows" she shouldn't do it and is just doing it for spite. What she "knows" is that if you come home and there's a chair in toothpicks or puddles all over the carpet, you're going to launch into a dramatic display of anger. Her appeasing posture is designed to avert your wrath. So don't be fooled by her groveling and slinking around — she's waving a white flag so you don't shoot, and it won't have the slightest impact on what she does the next day when you're gone. Don't believe me? You're not alone, the belief that dogs "know" that they shouldn't chew on the couch is a very hard one to give up. If you find that you can't believe me, you might ask yourself if scolding her when you return home is working. If it's not, for whatever reason, perhaps you might want to consider another alternative, unless of course you enjoy returning to inside-out couches.

If you are sure that anxiety is what's driving your dog's inappropriate behavior, your job is to teach your dog a new reaction when you walk out the door.

If you do come home and throw a tantrum, you probably won't stop the chewing, but you might end up with a dog who becomes truly anxious about being alone in the house, because sometime, somewhere, you're going to come home and yell at her. Actually, I should put this section under "How to Create Separation Anxiety"

in Your Dog” because scaring your dog when you come in the door is a great way to do it.

Get in the habit of coming home with no drama, no matter what you find. If it helps, take your frustration out on a pillow later when your offending best friend can't hear you. Or, use my favorite reaction when I'm enraged: in a sweet, loving voice I say something like: "I hate every tiny hair on your furry little body." Saying those words, although your tone is full of love and affection, is oh-so satisfying after yet one more piece of bad news in a lousy day.

2. Keep your comings and going low-key.

As described in the Prevention Section, don't emotionally overload your dog when you come and go. If you act like it's a major event, why shouldn't they? Teach your dog that your coming and going is just no big deal by reviewing the section under Prevention about staying calm whenever you come and go (page 12).

3. Begin a desensitizing and counterconditioning procedure to teach your dog to feel good when you walk out.

This is the foundation of treatment, so read this section every morning until it's second nature! The key is to create situations where your dog feels happy when you leave, and to prevent him from being scared as the door closes. You'll notice that I said feel good "when you leave", not "while you're gone". Most dogs with Separation Anxiety are in a panic by the time you've shut the door behind you, and many of them are terrified long before that. They've learned to associate your routine — putting on your coat, getting your keys, maybe even combing your hair — with your departure. Those events on their own can trigger fear before you get anywhere near the door. Your goal is to divide your departure and absence into tiny steps and gradually get your dog happy about each and every one of them. First read the steps below, and then write out your own customized plan.

The key is to create situations where your dog feels happy when you leave, and to prevent him from being scared as the door closes.

Write down the “triggers” that cue your dog that you are leaving: Spend a few days getting very clear about exactly where in the leaving process your dog gets concerned. It’s important that you find the “beginning”, because you need to start before your dog gets nervous for treatment to work. The “triggers” are the events that initiate concern in your dog, the things you do that clue your dog in to your subsequent departure. The most common ones are picking up your keys, and putting on your shoes or your jacket. But we all have different routines, and our dogs are experts at matching up one event with another. Some dogs begin to pace when their female owners put on lipstick. Others start hyperventilating when their guys dry their hair, or close up the bedroom, or turn off the radio. The “triggers” are the stimuli that usually precede your walking out without your dog, and your dog can become conditioned to respond to them with an emotion, just like he can learn to move his body when you say “sit”. Picking up your keys and saying “sit” are both events that your dog has learned to associate with something. It’s just that one elicits an action on his part, while the other elicits an emotion.

RANDOMLY Desensitize the “triggers”: Some experts advise you to teach your dog to dis-associate the triggers with your departure. Five times each day, do one trigger at a time, without actually going anywhere. If putting on your coat is a trigger for your dog, then get your coat and ignore your dog completely. Do anything for a minute or two: watch TV, talk on the phone, balance your checkbook — do anything but leave the house. Then take your coat off and continue to ignore your dog. Repeat this whenever you can. The idea is to teach your dog a new association — that coats, or keys, or hairbrushes, don’t mean much at all. I think that it’s important to use caution with this method however. Don’t do this within an hour of leaving, or you might just sensitize your dog to be more anxious when you actually go. If your dog has severe Separation Anxiety, be sure to do only one action at a time, and briefly at that — maybe pick up your keys and then instantly put them down while you’re watching TV. The trick is to insure that your dog quickly dis-associates these events with your actually walking out the door.

ROUTINELY Countercondition the triggers: Most importantly, begin a program that teaches your dog a new association between your leaving cues and how he feels. Now that you’ve identified the

triggers, figure out what your dog adores that will keep him happy while you busy yourself with your keys or coat. Most dogs respond best to food, stashed away in a hollow toy. The dog has to work to get the food out, so that his attention stays on the toy for a longer time than if you'd just tossed treats on the floor. And I don't just mean any old food. You've got to get serious here, so find a food that has the same effect as your favorite dinner after a long fast on a cold day. Most dogs are attracted to smelly gushy stuff, so try peanut butter or Liverwurst in a Kong® toy or Jerky Treats™ smooshed into a Sterile Beef Bone™. (Kongs® are the safest toy I know, although in my experience the boiled sterile beef bones seem to hold dogs' attention the longest. But some dogs can injure their teeth on them, so talk to your vet about what would be best for your dog.)

Ready the tempting treat while your dog watches you and drools, then put it down and wait for him to become lost in extracting the food. Once he's fully engaged, perform a brief rendition of one of his triggers — let's just use keys since that's such a universal cue for dogs. Put down the Kong®, wait 'til he's got his tongue stretched out of his head in the peanut butter, and then pick up your keys and put them down again. Then walk over and take away the Kong®. “What?!” we hope he says. “Wait a minute, I was still working on that.” Good, now put it down again, let him get busy with it and jingle your keys again. Put them down and then take away the toy. Repeat that a few more times, then take away the toy for good and go off and do something else.

What happened is that your dog heard the keys jingle while feeling happy, rather than feeling stressed. A few hours later, repeat this exercise, except this time pick up the keys and put on your jacket. Then, (sigh), take off your jacket, put down your keys and take away the stuffed toy. “Drat”, says Fido, “he's come back again!” Repeat that four or five times in one session, and then take a well-deserved break. Every day, gradually add the steps of your actually leaving the house while your dog slurps on his desert.

After a few days, if you're sure that your dog is now relaxed when he hears the keys, then pick up the keys BEFORE you put down the Kong®, then put on your jacket. This is the actual Counterconditioning (keys first, Kong® next) that will teach your dog to associate all your “leaving triggers” with feeling happy, or at

least relaxed. The speed with which you progress depends on the severity of the problem. (See sample schedule for more details.) Most serious cases of Separation Anxiety can be cured in about six to eight weeks, while milder ones can be improved in just a few weeks.

I've learned that in most cases the critical part of the entire process is to get the dog comfortable with you leaving the house. If these dogs are fine while you walk out, then they're fine the rest of the day. There are dogs, however, that are comfortable for five to ten minutes alone, but then work up to becoming more and more anxious, so learn everything that you can about your dog's routine and then work on gradually expanding your dog's level of comfort.

A "typical" treatment schedule (but of course, all dogs are different) skews heavily on the early stages of departure and absence, where one entire month can be taken up with getting your dog relaxed about your getting ready, opening the door, stepping outside and standing there for just a few seconds before returning and taking away the toy. At this point I can imagine you thinking that your dog will be geriatric before you can actually leave him all day long. But take heart, once you reach the point where you can walk out the door, it's usually relatively fast and easy to expand five seconds to 60, one minute to five minutes, five minutes to an hour, etc. You're better off spending more time on the early stages, and then the process of lengthening the time of departure will go much faster.

4. Find a way to leave your dog during your usual absences where she's not anxious.

"Uh, hello? . . ." you might be saying. If you could do that, why would you be reading this booklet, right? Before you toss this through the window, let me explain. If you're working every day to condition your dog to feel relaxed and comfortable during your "mini-departures", all your hard work will go out the window if you then follow the same routine and leave for eight hours. Counterconditioning works by gradually teaching her to associate each tiny step of your leaving with feeling good. It won't work if you then go backwards each day and overwhelm her with more than she can handle. You can't quit smoking by not smoking all night and then doing it all day, so you need to find some way to leave your dog where she's comfortable when you're not playing

the conditioning game. That's the bad news. The good news is that after guffawing or gulping, my clients always come up with a solution. So can you, honest. Here's a list of what has worked for others:

Drive to a friend

Several of my clients have found good friends who are at home during the day who are more than happy to have a doggy friend for the day. If your dog likes other dogs, this might be a plus, since then they can romp together and you'll come home to an especially mellow dog. Keep in mind that some dogs are anxious about being alone, and any warm body will do, while a small percentage of them want you and only you. Just knowing which kind of dog you have will be helpful in treatment, and should drive your solution about what to do with your dog if you can't leave him home.

Find a dog sitter

This solution always seems impossible, yet many of my clients have amazed themselves (and me) and by finding someone who is happy to come spend the day in their house with their dog. One busy physician client adopted a German Shepherd mix who did about \$5,000 worth of damage the first day she left her alone. She couldn't imagine how she could find a way to keep her dog company, until she sent a flyer around her apartment complex. A neighbor was a part-time student who loved dogs and couldn't have any of her own. The girl studied all day with the shepherd, was paid a very minimal salary for baby sitting the dog, and in six weeks all was well. Everyone's first reaction seems to be that there is no one who could possibly "house sit" your dog, but I'd guess about a third of my clients end up finding sitters in spite of their disbelief that they ever would!

Doggy day care or boarding kennels

Check around and find out if there's a business in your area that takes care of dogs during the day. There are more and more of them around the country, so don't assume you can't find one. This works well for some dogs, because they spend most of their day with other dogs, and are never really alone. Alternatively, some traditional kennels have day rates. Being alone in a kennel works great for some dogs, even though they don't like being alone at home. Other dogs may become even more anxious about your departure, so don't use the standard kennel option unless you are sure that your dog loves being in the kennel.

Take your dog with you

Obviously this is not always possible. But some people can bring their dog to work. If your dog can't come in your office, perhaps he might do well in your car. I see lots of dogs who are wrecks at home but perfectly happy to sit and wait for their owners in the parking lot. If so, this can work beautifully if you are blessed with nice, cool weather. Warning!!! This can never work in even moderately warm weather — cars turn into greenhouses shockingly quickly. Your dog can die in a vehicle in minutes, so the car is out unless the weather is just right (not too warm, not too cold). Check with your veterinarian if you're not sure what's safe for your own dog.

Leave your dog in another part of the house

If none of those options is possible, your best recourse is to create two different environments in your own home. If, for example, you want your dog to eventually have free run of the downstairs, perhaps you could “crate” him upstairs in the bedroom when you're gone for long periods. Or if you'd like him comfortable in your bedroom, perhaps you could house him in the basement while you're gone. Every dog is different, so it's important to be very thoughtful about which environments will work best for your dog. Start by deciding what your goal is: where and how do you want to leave your dog? Free range of the entire house actually might be too much stimulation for some dogs. Consider giving her several rooms to live in that are back from the front of the house and away from windows where they'll be over-stimulated. (Don't make the mistake of thinking that your dog needs what you want! Lots of pretty views out the window can make dogs nervous if they're home alone.) This is the part of the house you'll use for Counterconditioning, since this is the area you want your dog to associate with feeling good when you leave.

Next, decide where your dog will do best when you have to be gone for longer periods. Dogs are most afraid in an area of the house that you never use, so try not to stash them away in the unused basement. Rather, find a place where they can't do too much damage that feels like part of the “den” — an old spare bedroom that you're going to remodel, a basement room where you spend time watching movies with your dog on weekends, a crate in the bedroom, and leave them there when you go to work. You can help your dog feel comfortable in this area by hanging out there —

sit down with a magazine and get your scent on the floor, rub his belly there, give him treats in the room so that he feels more and more comfortable. Each dog is different, so you'll have to be thoughtful about where you can best balance your dog's anxiety, and your house's security.

Crates work beautifully for some dogs, lessening their anxiety considerably, while other dogs learn to associate crates with the fear that they have when they're alone, and go into a panic when you point to the crate. I've had several otherwise sweet dogs who were so terrified of the crate that they became aggressive in their attempt to avoid them. If this is your dog, then drop the crate for now and confine your dog to a part of the house where he can do limited damage.

It can help to put the dog in this room several times a day without actually leaving the house, but try to avoid going through your usual routine and then leaving him there all day. You want to teach a new association to those "triggers" of coat, hat and keys, so don't go through your usual leaving routine and then put him here. Rather, do all you can to get ready to go without him seeing you - put him in the room early, pack up the car the night before, etc. Leave the "triggers" for the Counterconditioning game, so that you don't undo all your good work of the night before when you leave for work in the morning.

5. Will another dog help?

Sometimes, but think long and hard before you get a dog for your dog. I worry about people who get another dog when they really don't want one themselves. Don't get me wrong, I love having multiple dogs (I have four now, and one cat), but not everyone wants to spit dog hair out of their mouth every evening. Two dogs can be more than twice the work of one, so I don't recommend getting another dog if you don't want one yourself.

But there are cases where another dog (or cat) helps a great deal. This works especially well for dogs who are truly panicked about being alone, and take great comfort in the presence of another dog. This is particularly true of dogs who spent a lot of time in kennels around other dogs. Some dogs, however, are not so much anxious about being alone, but about being away from YOU, and another dog has no effect at all. Some of these dogs are even anxious if

there's a human there who's not their owner, so another dog probably isn't going to help. If this sounds familiar, then you would be smart to work on some of the exercises in the section below that help your dog be more comfortable when not attached to your calf.

6. Teaching “velcro” dogs to handle separation.

If your dog isn't soothed by the presence of another person, or if he shadows you around the house obsessively, it can't hurt to teach him to be more comfortable when he's away from you. You can work on this when you're home, by getting him used to being in another room of the house when you're home. The easiest way to do this is to give him some food that he has to work to get. (See the section on stuffed toys on page 18.) Try stuffing a Kong® or giving him a Buster Cube® and shutting the door between you. If possible, use a food that's not as good as what he gets when you are doing your conditioning exercises. In the first weeks, return to him and take the toy away before he's eaten all the food, then gradually let him stay there longer and longer.

You can also teach a good solid stay (start with short ones, you remain in the room and give him treats while he's on the stay, not when he gets up). Once he'll stay a few minutes in the same room as you, begin to ask him to stay for just a few seconds when you leave the room. Do this gradually — stop and stand in the doorway at first, later move on to disappearing halfway behind the door, then completely. Eventually he should be comfortable on a down/stay for 10 or 15 minutes with you in another room. Don't expect him to “get it” without you teaching this like a circus trick and paying attention every second while he's on a stay. And above all, don't get angry because he got up, simply bring him back into the room and pantomime the visual signals that you've used to teach him to stay. Resist the urge to repeat the word “stay”, since by doing so you're simply “starting over” to your dog, and he'll never learn he shouldn't have gotten up in the first place.

This is the dog who can also profit from learning to inhibit himself and to deal with frustration, so pick up the Leader of the Pack booklet, or any book that helps your dog learn in a positive way “that good things come to those who wait”.

7. Will corrections help?

If your dog has serious Separation Anxiety, forget about using a correction. It won't work, and it might make it worse. Honest. OK, so you're mad. Remember my tip earlier about sweetly saying terrible things to your dog to help alleviate your anger without making your dog more anxious. In a few rare cases I have used mild corrections after lots of other work, but those cases are so rare and atypical that I hesitate to even describe them. So take your understandable anger about your formerly beautiful couch out on something it can't hurt, and then sit down and figure out how to prevent the same thing from happening again.

If your dog has serious Separation Anxiety, forget about using a correction. It won't work, and it might make it worse.

8. What about medications?

Some dogs are so terrified that their very health is at risk. Peaches the Shar pei turned her little turnip face into hamburger trying to get out of her crate in a new apartment. You've already heard about Misty the Weimaraner who crashed through glass windows and redecorated her back. In cases this severe, and if there's simply no alternative to leaving your dog alone, you might consider using adjunctive medical therapy along with Counterconditioning. Clomicalm has been approved for use in veterinary medicine to assist in treatment of Separation Anxiety, and some owners have had success with similar medications that can help the dog over "the hump" until conditioning begins to kick in. Be sure that the medication that you discuss with your veterinarian acts to decrease anxiety or panic, rather than simply to sedate your dog into a state of quiet desperation. The medications most often used now include: Tricyclic antidepressants (TCA's) like amitriptyline HCl (Elavil) or clomipramine (Clomicalm, Anafranil); selective serotonin re-uptake inhibitors (SSRI's) like fluoxetine (Prozac); and benzodiazepines like diazepam (Valium) and alprazolam (Xanax). TCA's and SSRI's must build up in the bloodstream to a therapeutic dose, and thus must be given every day for several weeks before you see an effect. Benzodiazepines, on the other hand, are relatively fast acting but only last for 4 to 8 hours in most dogs. I have not seen dogs do well on a common sedative, Acepromazine. Perhaps that is because a dog that is unable to move his muscles can still be anxious. My Ph.D. research included taking brain wave recordings

from dogs on Acepromazine, and their brains were going a mile a minute. So if you and your veterinarian use a medication, insure that it is designed to ameliorate anxiety, not just slow down your dog's body.

All medications have side effects, and some of them are serious, so don't even think about using medication unless your dog has a severe case. Your veterinarian will need to do some tests on your dog to increase the probability that the use of medications is safe, and should continue to monitor your dog's physiology to keep it safe. And remember that there have been very few studies that researched the effectiveness of any drugs on treating Separation Anxiety, and Clomicalm is the only drug that is labeled for use in dogs. The research found that the drug helped alleviate the symptoms of Separation Anxiety if used in conjunction with a conditioning program to be effective in the long term. So don't think of drugs as an "easy" solution to your dog's problem, but rather as a tool to be used in conjunction with behavior modification programs.

SAMPLE SCHEDULE

Here's what a schedule of conditioning looks like for a hypothetical dog, who gets nervous when her owner puts on her coat, gets more agitated when the keys get picked up and eats through the walls during the day while the owner is at work: (For convenience, I'll call the owner Ann and the dog Lassie.) This is for a serious case of Separation Anxiety, and can be considerably shortened if your dog is just a little nervous about being alone or you're working on prevention when leaving your dog in a new place. Don't try to cut corners though if your dog has full blown Separation Anxiety, you can end up teaching your dog to be afraid of Kongs® and peanut butter and then you're in one heck of a mess.

Week One:

- 5-10 times a day Ann randomly either plays with her keys, puts on her coat or walks to the door. Each of these acts is performed separately, and never within an hour of her actual departure. You might also put on your "go to work coat" before walking with

your dog, since dogs seem to quickly learn which clothes mean walks and which mean your absence. Thus, you've created a positive association, rather than just a neutral one. You might also take your keys on walks with you, if you wouldn't normally.

- On the first day, one to three times (sessions) a day, Ann plays the "Conditioning game", where she stuffs a hollow toy with a food that she knows that Lassie loves. Ann puts the toy down, puts on her coat, takes it off and takes away the toy, saying nothing to Lassie. Each session includes 3-5 repetitions.
- Every other day she adds one small step of her leaving routine, so that by the end of the week she is putting down the toy, putting on her coat, picking up her keys and walking one step toward the door. I'd suggest going out a door that you usually don't leave from, if you can arrange it. Your dog already associates your going through one door with trouble, so if you can use another one, all the better. Try especially to avoid doors where your dog can watch you walk away if you think this upsets her.

Week Two:

- Ann continues randomly performing her departure "triggers", but if all is going well, starts combining them. So this week she might put on her coat and pick up her keys and then sit on the couch and watch TV for awhile. Try again for 5-10 times each day, unless your dog looks anxious and stays anxious even if you don't leave the house. If so, you're just going too far too fast, so back down to the level that your dog can handle. If your dog isn't paying less attention to your triggers by the end of week two, then stop trying to "randomly" get your dog to ignore these signals, and "routinely" countercondition them as described above. (Give her something wonderful, like a stuffed toy, to chew on while you put on your coat.)
- Meanwhile, her Counterconditioning game progresses to adding an approach all the way to the door. Each day get closer and closer to the door, ending the week by turning the knob (but not actually opening the door). Thus, one to three times a day she has a conditioning session, that includes three to five repetitions of the same sequence (toy to dog, put on coat, get keys, walk to door, turn knob, turn around, take off coat, put down keys, take away toy). Gradually put the toy down later in the sequence (i.e. coat first, then toy).

Week Three:

- Ann is now sick to death of putting her coat on, but does it anyway, because she loves her dog! Hang in there! This is a tough, but very important week. I once heard it said that it takes 21 to 28 days for a person to change a habit, but I know from experience that most people (me included) are great working on a new project for about two weeks. Then it gets old. Could it be that dogs need the same amount of time to change a habit? Who knows, but I'd be very surprised if they need less time than humans. So this third week is a critical week: it's vital to your dog, but it's extra hard because you're getting bored with it. Anticipate the problem by creating support for yourself — highly successful people do it all the time in any endeavor, so follow their lead and give yourself rewards, have friends make you dinner, or bring you flowers or whatever works to help you keep at it!
- This week your Counterconditioning efforts will revolve around teaching your dog to stay happy while you're outside the door for longer than a half of a second. Try alternating being gone from one to ten seconds this week. The first few days put on your coat, get your keys, do your usual toy presentation, and open the door, then shut it and return. If Lassie is OK with that, then stay outside for just a second, and then return. Repeat this three to five times each session, trying to get in several sessions a day (give yourself a day off sometimes!) If you hear your dog leave the toy, and come to whine or scratch at the door, then go backwards to a shorter time period. Continue working with this shorter duration until your dog settles and then gradually work your way up again. Try to work up to ten seconds or so this week.
- Meanwhile, continue randomly performing the triggers, being sure that you haven't fallen into a routine without knowing it. Don't do them at the same time every day, or right after your dinner, or in any way that makes them patterned.
- Many people wonder if they should correct their dog from barking or scratching if they're standing outside the door. If your dog has a serious case of Separation Anxiety I strongly advise against it. It won't alleviate her anxiety and it might reward her because she at least got your attention. Negative attention is still attention, so in this case, stay silent and be gone for less time for the next repetitions. However, if your dog isn't really that anxious, slapping the

door or tapping the window when your dog starts to fuss might startle them out of it. Be cautious here, you're much better off not doing it at all than making your dog worse, and it can't possibly help a dog who is already out of her own control anyway.

Week Four:

- Since your Counterconditioning is going to include your being outside longer and longer this week, try dropping or at least decreasing the number of 'random' cues this week. You might put your coat on for no reason once or twice on Monday, skip it Tuesday and try it again on Wednesday.
- Work on being outside the house for longer and longer. If you ended last week with ten second long departures, then vary the time you're outside the house from eight seconds to fifty or sixty seconds this week. What you do outside depends on your dog and your circumstances. Most dogs can hear their owners get to the car, shut the car door and then turn the key, so you have to get them used to that too. Your dog may or may not be ready for this step. If there's any doubt, be conservative and don't add any more triggers right now, just stand back from the door and twiddle your thumbs for a minute or so. Halfway through the week you might experiment by walking to the car and opening and shutting the car door. This is a great time to use a tape recorder. A recorder will tell you if your dog is whining or scratching at the door and it's the only way to be sure what's really going on (except a video tape, which is even better!)

Week Five to Week?:

- If all is going well, week five is the week to start adding on the last "real triggers" of your departure: shutting the car door, starting the engine and driving away. If all is going well, you might be able to work up to driving around the block by the END of this week, remembering to condition each little trigger along the way (car door, turning the key, etc.) Of course everyone's triggers are different: if you live in an apartment building it might be the door to your hall. If you don't think your dog is that far along, take heart. Remember the first stages are usually the hardest, and once your dog is comfortable with you leaving for five minutes, it's not very hard or time consuming to work up to much longer durations.

- If your dog seems comfortable when you drive around the block, the key is to start leaving for longer and longer periods of time. If you have a “dog sitter”, start having them pull in as you pull out, then five minutes later, then ten minutes etc. etc. If your dog goes to day care during the day, then do this on the weekend, when you can run to the market or a friend’s for a brief absence and see how it’s going. From here on in, it’s almost impossible to write out a schedule, because every case is so different. But sometimes you can go from a ten minute absence to an hour long one in just one week, and can often stretch an hour into half a day in another two week or three weeks. Thus most people can finish this program (phew!) in about six to eight weeks. Aimee followed this plan to the letter with her adorable American Eskimo who panted, drooled and vomited whenever she left. Like clock work, he was fine in six weeks when she came to work without him. On the other hand, Sharon’s Wiemaraner, Misty, wins the unfortunate distinction of being my toughest case, but her year long heroic efforts are paying off.

***This serious, frustrating, crazy-making problem
has a very high treatment success.***

So there it is. The bad news and the good news. The bad news is obvious: there’s no easy way out of Separation Anxiety, it requires time and patience and a good understanding of just what to do to get a dog out of his or her panic. But take heart, I’ve saved the good news until last. This serious, frustrating, crazy-making problem has a very high treatment success. Granted, it took almost a year to cure in my toughest two cases (yes, that’s even with using adjunctive medical therapy), but in most cases the cure comes in six to eight weeks. Unlike some other behavioral problems, once you’re done, you’re done, and all your troubles become part of you and your dog’s interesting history, rather than a daily disaster. Some dogs might regress if you move or make some other major change, but you can almost always prevent trouble by playing a short, simple version of the conditioning game during the first days of the new routine. So take heart, design your own customized plan, kiss your dog, eat some chocolate, and know that someday soon, when you say: “I’ll be Home Soon”, your sweet, soft-eyed dog will curl up and nap until you come home.

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If you'd like to read more about Separation Anxiety, here are some good resources:

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"This little booklet saved both my life and that of my Weimaraner, Misty. Misty's separation anxiety was so serious that she went through a glass window, badly lacerating herself in the process. After following the good sense and clear advice in this booklet, Misty and I lived a much a happier life. We are both very, very grateful!"

— Sharon Stern (and Misty, the Weimaraner)

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consulting business, Dog's Best Friend, Ltd., and her nationally syndicated radio show, Calling All Pets. She is the behavior columnist for BARK magazine ("the New Yorker of Dog Magazines") and a Consulting Editor for the Journal of Comparative Psychology. She is also Adjunct Associate Professor in Zoology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, teaching "The Biology and Philosophy of Human/Animal Relationships." Dr. McConnell is a much sought after speaker and seminar presenter, and author of the nationally acclaimed book "The Other End of the Leash: Why We Do What We Do Around Dogs" and "For the Love of a Dog: Understanding Emotion in You and Your Best Friend."



Does your dog panic when you leave the house? Do you come home afraid of what your dog has done in your absence? If so, this booklet is for you. A treasure trove of ideas for keeping your dog happy when you're gone, I'll Be Home Soon distinguishes between dogs with separation anxiety and dogs who 'merely' misbehave, and then provides a clear, step-by-step program to keep your dog happy (and your house safe) while you're away. This little booklet is also an excellent resource for puppy buyers who would like to prevent separation anxiety, and raise dogs who can be trusted when left home alone.

