

Canine Separation Anxiety: Why Your Dog Fears Being Alone

Authored by
mohammad looti

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Separation Anxiety in Dogs is a condition where dogs, when left alone, exhibit distress and behavior problems. It is similar to Separation Anxiety Disorder that people experience when they are away from someone they feel strongly emotionally attached to (i.e. a father or mother). In pets' case, they become distressed and anxious when they are separated from their owner.

Since dogs are "pack" animals, they naturally want to always be with their owners (who they consider their pack). Most normal dogs are able to handle being alone for about 8 hours a day; as long as they have a yard to defecate. For dogs with Separation Anxiety, they become nervous when owners go to leave and often will try to leave with them. As they are leaving, one can hear them barking, wishing that they would come back. And, upon return, they find their home has been destroyed in some way or the dog has, to some extreme, hurt themselves.

Separation Anxiety affects even those pets who receive the most love and attention; it does not only affect neglected pets.

Typical Behaviors

Often owners confuse their pets behavior with discipline problems rather than with a disorder. Some behavior characteristics to look out for in a pet one might think is suffering from separation anxiety are:

Destructive chewing

Howling, barking, whining

urination, defecation in the house

self mutilation

Digging and scratching at doors or windows in an attempt to reunite with their owner

Causes

The cause of dog separation anxiety is unknown. Some pets retain their early fear of being left alone. Causes can include:

being left alone early in life

rejection as puppies

lack of stimulation

poor health.

Older pets have difficult times with moving from place to place and accepting new people or pets into their lives.