

## Separation Anxiety - supplement to Crate-Training

*Many dogs will whine or bark for a short time when first left alone in a new home but soon give up and learn to relax while you are out. Give them at least 30-60min to give it up. However, some dogs develop separation anxiety and truly panic when left alone, barking non-stop, destroying things, breaking out/escaping, and potentially hurting themselves. We've seen torn-up sofas, gnawed-through doors, and much peeing and pooping from panicking dogs left alone in a home.*

### **Prevention is best!**

Wanting to spend as much time as possible with your dog is understandable but, in the long term, it will not help your dog. **This is incredibly important:**

- If you hang out playing and cuddling all weekend and then go to work on Monday, your dog won't understand why he/she is suddenly being left alone. So if your dog is new to your home, do yourself and the dog a big favor and start practicing "alone time" from the beginning, and keep practicing it.
- Having the dog sleep in your bed and generally be glued to your side 24/7 also worsens separation anxiety tendencies, so create some space and have the dog sleep in his own bed.

### **Addressing Separation Anxiety**

The safest place for a dog to be while left alone is in a sturdy crate, so the **first step for addressing separation anxiety is Crate Training**.

**Please refer to the Crate-Training handout about how to calmly introduce the crate and teach the dog to get used to and be happy in the crate.**

**BE AWARE THAT A DOG SHOULD NOT BE CRATED FOR MORE THAN 4 HOURS PER DAY TOTAL, PLUS 8-9 HOURS OVERNIGHT.** We believe that is the maximum that is fair as part of a nice, enriched life.

**If you are away longer than that, you need to figure out dogwalkers, dog-sitters, or consider doggie daycare. It is NOT ok to crate your dog all day.**

- Make sure you crate them at night! Most dogs quickly get used to being crated to sleep overnight, so this is the best way to ensure they are used to sleeping in the crate and feel safe in there during the day too.
- With some dogs, a chew (nylabone, antler, or filled Kong toy) works to keep them occupied while they are crated / while you are out, and generally makes the crate a happy place. Give them this **ONLY** when they are crated and/or to distract them when you leave the house.

- If the dog barks/whines or scratches/bites the crate, correct them. A firm verbal “No!” or “Eh!-Eh!” should quiet them. Don’t get mad, anger won’t help, but do correct them so that they learn that this is not acceptable behavior and won’t help them get out.
- With a dog who is anxious about being left alone, you don’t want the dog to associate the crate with being left alone, so crate them several times for short periods (10-60min) during the day, while staying at home! Just randomly put them in the crate and keep going about your day at home. Place the crate in the same room as you are - the living room or office. (You can have another crate in the bedroom if you want the dog to sleep in there at nighttime, but during the day the dog should be crated in the main living area of the home, where people normally are, so he can observe and hang out with you all while crated.)

### Leaving the house

Just get up and walk out - no big fuss. Don’t talk to the dog or pet them.

Vary the amount of time you leave for. If the dog is crated and safe, you can stay out for as long as a couple of hours, but sometimes you should stay out only for a few minutes, come back in, go back out, etc.

**If the dog starts barking / whining...** Open the door, immediately yell a correction to snap them out of it, and close the door again. You may need to wait outside the door and repeat this a few times. The idea is to show the dog that this behavior is not what we want. He has to understand that barking/whining is unwanted and will not get you back home or him out of the crate.

### Coming back into the house

Ideally, listen out for your dog to be quiet before you come back inside.

If they are quiet, go in, but don’t praise them, don’t pay them any attention, just go in, do your own thing for a few minutes, allow them to calm down, then let them out and ignore them.

*If you give the dog loads of attention as soon as you get home, they will start to crave that moment, that reward of your attention. You don’t want a dog who is desperate to get out/have you back, because it defeats the point of him being happy and calm while crated or left alone.*

**Remember to keep it all a neutral, no-big-deal experience.**

### Practice makes perfect !

The more often you can crate the dog and/or leave the room / house for short periods during the day, the less of a big deal it becomes. Put them in the crate, ignore them for a while, let them back out. No big deal. Sometimes you stay in the same room as the dog, sometimes you leave. If they whine, correct them, then keep ignoring. Build up the time you leave for - start with 10-30min, repeat repeat repeat, then start increasing the time -- up to 4hrs maximum crated.

**If the dog starts panicking before you even leave...** Don't become predictable or else the dog will get anxious as soon as he knows you are leaving. If picking up keys or putting on your shoes set him into a panic, desensitize your dog to this trigger by repeatedly picking up your keys/putting on your shoes randomly, and then not leaving the house. Eventually he will stop jumping as soon as he hears keys/sees shoes, but it will take several weeks or months and a *lot* of repetition and desensitizing.

**Repeat, repeat, REPEAT!**

**If the dog gets destructive...** (tears up his bedding while you are gone), don't give them a blanket. If they let their frustration out on something then they don't learn to deal with the situation. We also suggest you reinforce weak points of the crate with zip-ties or carabiners so that the dog can't break out.



*If you see this ...*

**If the dog breaks out of the crate...** (or destroys the plastic tray) you need a stronger crate and metal tray. This is important for the safety of the dog. Once they realize they cannot get out, they will stop fighting it.



*you may need this.*

### *How long will it take?*

This really depends on the dog and on how much practice you can give them. Most dogs will stop fighting the crate or trying to break out within a few days, but barking or whining may take significantly longer. Obviously you can't correct the dog while you are away, so sometimes you just have to ride that out.

**If you keep calm and patient and consistently practice alone time, the dog will learn.**