

If you are among the lucky people who obtained a new puppy or adult dog during the pandemic, **CONGRATULATIONS!** Most likely you and your new companion have benefited from a lot of time together. Even existing pets have probably enjoyed and benefited from your increased presence. However, as you return to a normal life, whether it is leaving the home for work or just pleasure, your canine family member may not like it so much. There are a number of ways they can act. Many will become bored and start to chew up things. Some dogs, especially younger ones, may have trouble holding their urine all day. Your neighbors may report that your dog barked or howled while you were away. Unfortunately, some dogs, especially those rescued from a shelter or organization, will experience Separation Anxiety.

Separation Anxiety (SA) is more than just a dog that barks for a few minutes or one that chews up a pillow. True SA is a panic disorder and your canine companion cannot help itself. A dog suffering from SA may vocalize for hours at a time, urinate or defecate in the home or crate, and drool excessively. Often dogs will chew window and door casings or scratch at doors and windows to get out and search for their owner. SA can result in the need for expensive repairs, angry neighbors and injuries to your buddy. The worst consequence is the decreased quality of life these poor dogs are experiencing due to their anxiety and depression.

We hope that you and your dog are not experiencing any of these issues ... but if you are, there are steps you can take now to lessen the chance of problems in the future. Even if you are isolating at home you should still be able to get out of the house occasionally for drives or walks. Leaving your buddy behind, start with just short times away and gradually extend the time you are gone, as long as you do not see signs of any problems upon your return. Signs that your dog did not accept your absence well could be:

- Wet whiskers and front legs from drooling excessively
- Urine or feces in the house,
- Destruction of property

For dogs that are not having a true panic attack you may just need some distractions for them. You can reserve their favorite toys or safe chews for when you are gone. Food dispensing toys such as Kongs are great ways to give a dog something fun to do and are pretty safe to use even when no one is around. If you have an extreme chewer be sure to get the black ones. If your dog will take these when you are home but refuses them in your absence then he/she is very likely having a panic episode.

If your dog is getting worried as you leave:

- Try to get things ready the night before. This helps to decrease the cues that can increase your dog's anxiety.
- When you come home try not to be too exuberant about greeting your dog. It is best to wait for him/her to calm a bit before petting. (We no longer believe that completely ignoring the dog until it calms down is proper, however.) Use your common sense. You may be equally happy to see your dog but the more worked up he/she gets the harder it is to accept your absence again.

If you feel that your canine companion is possibly suffering from Separation Anxiety we encourage you to make an appointment with our Behaviorist Dr. Anna Woolley. She has resources to help you and your pup get through this transition.