

COVID-19 & Canine Separation Anxiety

The abrupt transition from constant human presence during COVID-19 Shelter-in-Place orders to significant periods of dogs being home alone as pet parents return to work could trigger the onset of separation anxiety in some dogs. Dogs who suffer from separation anxiety experience significant distress when separated from their attachment figure(s). Manifestations of that anxiety often include destruction, vocalization, excessive activity and elimination when left home alone.



Suggestions to help mitigate the risk of dogs developing separation anxiety in relation to COVID-19

Tips for Shelter-In-Place/Stay-At-Home Orders:

- Practice daily periods of separation from your dog to maintain their confidence/comfort in your absence. For example:
 - Take a walk without your dog
 - Close doors in the house so your dog doesn't always have access to you
 - Go for a short drive without your dog
- Always keep reunion greetings after periods of separation from your dog low key/unemotional
- If you use a specific room or crate to confine your dog when you are away from home, have your dog spend some time in that location on a routine basis even when you are home
 - Pair placement in that confinement location with something rewarding like a long-lasting food treat or a favorite toy
- Pets can perceive and be impacted by our emotional state. Practice self-care to reduce personal stress and anxiety during these turbulent times.



Tips for Return to Work:

- If your dog is exhibiting signs of separation anxiety or you have concerns that your dog is anxious, contact your veterinarian.
 - Veterinarians are uniquely qualified to diagnose and treat separation anxiety; treatment may include social management (e.g. daycare, pet sitters), behavioral modification, pheromone therapy, nutritional therapy and/or drug therapy
 - Don't delay: early intervention can help improve outcomes
- Minimize drama during departures/greetings
 - Try to have everything organized so there is no frantic searching for keys, rushing around house, yelling, etc. as you are about to depart
 - Avoid emotional good-byes or reunions with your dog
- Pair a positive reward with your departure
 - Long lasting food treats such as puzzle toys stuffed with yummy treats can create a positive association with your departure/absence
- Do not reprimand or punish your pet for destructive or elimination behavior that occurred in your absence
- During Shelter-in-Place orders, many dogs enjoyed increased daily walks around the neighborhood that provided both enrichment and exercise; try to maintain this beneficial activity when you return to working outside the home.