UK Spaniel Rescue

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Educate - Communicate - Rehabilitate - Collaborate

Separation Anxiety Worksheet

Firstly, know that separation anxiety is not your fault. It's also not your dog's fault. Separation anxiety is often the result of your dog's environment before they came to you or sometimes a dog develops separation anxiety for no apparent reason or past trauma. We simply don't know all the reasons as to the why & how.

Dogs are incredibly intelligent and easily pick up on the cues. For example, before you even leave your house, your dog knows what's going to happen, grabbing your keys, putting on your shoes, getting dressed, these are all signs to your dog that you're heading out the door. For dogs with separation anxiety, these signals eventually become the triggers of the anxiety itself, in other words, your dog begins to fear you grabbing the keys just as much as of you being gone.

The key is to teach them that these signals DO NOT mean you're leaving. What we can do is modify this behaviour using a method called de-sensitisation.

The exercises work best if you pace them carefully. As you go through the steps, watch your dog closely, if anything causes them distress, upset, or make them appear anxious slow the steps down. Pick the exercises that are more tolerable for your dog, this is so as not to tip them over their threshold.

For example, you might shorten the time that you are separated for or just practise being in sperate rooms. The key is to make the experience as consistently POSITIVE as possible for your dog.

Below are two exercises, please try the first exercise to de-sensitise your dog to the cues that have been practiced by him/her up to press (eg: picking up keys, putting shoes & coat on)

DE-SENSITISATION EXERCISES

EXERCISE 1

Step 1: You pick up your keys and put them in your pocket, then go sit down on the sofa.

Step 2: you put on your shoes & walk over and sit down and pet your dog.

After several repetitions of 1 & 2 move onto Step 3

Step 3: Repeat steps 1 & 2 & then walk out the door & quickly walk back in, sit on the sofa wait for your pup/dog to be calm then greet your pup/dog.

*Desensitisation is a process that takes many days or even weeks of work and isn't a one-time thing.

EXERCISE 2

Step 1: Take your dog for a walk prior to you leaving & make sure that he/she has toileted.

(This is important & if your dog needs to toilet while you are away this will add to their stress).

Step 2: Set up an area for your dog with a bowl of water & enrichment activities such as snuffle mat, stuffed kong, lickimat or appropriate chew toys.

Step 3: Leave the room briefly, approx. 60 seconds. Do not make a fuss when leaving, just leave quietly.

Step 4: After 60 seconds return to the room & sit on the sofa without making a fuss of your dog.

Step 5: Once your dog is calm, you can then make a fuss of them. You do not want to reinforce any manic or excitable behaviour.

Step 6: Repeat steps 1 through 5 each time increasing the time you leave your dog alone in small increments, for example 60 seconds, then 2 minutes, then 5minutes, then 10 minutes.

Eventually, before you know it you will be upto 30 minutes. As I have explained, this is not an overnight fix, these exercises do take time & you must be consistent. Do not try to move forward to quickly or you may find that you will have to return to the beginning steps again. Even after you have modified the behaviour you may find that you may have to refer back to these exercises occasionally.

Source: Wagology Dog Behaviour