

CRITTER KEEPER

Willamette Valley Animal Hospital



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Super Savings

Microchip Monday

Permanent, un-lose-able ID. Inserted and registered for just \$15 all day!

Toenail Tuesday

Stop that annoying clicking across the kitchen! Nail trims for cats are just \$7, only \$8 for dogs!

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See a vet for anything! Pay just \$15.75 for the exam all day!

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Super discounts on vaccines for your pets from 1 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. every week! Rabies vaccine only \$6!

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The Truth About Separation Anxiety

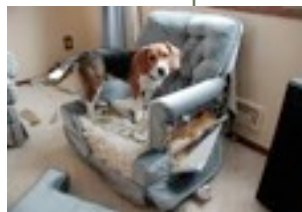
Does Spot love you so much that when you leave she can't stand it? Does she get so upset that your rugs, furniture, and anything else she can reach or knock down show signs of her affection? If she is a well-behaved dog when you're home and only turns into a nut case when she can't be with you, then Spot is probably suffering from separation anxiety. It is estimated that 10-15 percent of the canine population experiences some type of separation anxiety.

Separation anxiety is tied to a dog's natural instinct to be

part of a pack, which explains why cats do not seem to suffer from this problem. But there are many things you can do to help your lonely pooch out. She certainly deserves the help; after all, she acts out because she wants to be around you.

The difference between separation anxiety and just plain bad behavior is easy to see: pets with separation anxiety only act out when they are unable to get to their owners. In severe cases, anxious pooches will act out even when their owner is simply in another room with the door shut. Common ways of acting out include destructive

behavior, excessive barking, house soiling, attempts to escape, loss of appetite, inactivity, sadness or depression, and psychosomatic disorders such as diarrhea, vomiting, and excessive coat licking. Also, a dog suffering from separation anxiety will often closely shadow her owner when they're together.



Why Spot?

Why does your dog suffer from separation anxiety while your neighbor's dog is fine? The possibilities abound. Some dogs simply do not ever gain enough confidence in themselves to be on their own. For some, it's because they were left alone for too long when they were puppies. Others have had the misfortune of being abused or neglected. There are some poor pups that are pushed from home to home until they finally end up in an animal shelter; needless to say, they might be afraid of being left again.

Often a beloved pet is fine for years, then suddenly begins to act out. If her behavior seems inexplicable, take a look at the changes in your lifestyle that occurred around the same time Spot decided she loved the taste of your favorite chair. Maybe Mom went back to work or the kids left for college. Perhaps you got a new job requiring longer hours.



Whatever the reason, Spot is spending more time alone and she doesn't know what to do with herself.

A dog's bathroom schedule could influence anxiety. When a dog has to try to hold it past the point of being comfortable it builds

anxiety. If this is repeated routinely then she will become anxious at the thought of you leaving for long periods of time. This leads to anxiety as soon as you start to get ready to leave.

Taming the Trauma

Dealing with separation anxiety is different than dealing with just the problem behaviors. First, you must learn to check your anger at the door. Punishing Spot will not fix the problem--it will only make it worse. Once she associates your absence and return with punishment, her anxiety will increase (punishment can simply be a stern voice upon your return).

Your dog will automatically become submissive; they behave this way because it is natural to submit to the leader when they become angry, not because she knows what she did wrong.

There are many different ways you can help your dog deal with her fear. Your number one goal is to teach her that you can be

trusted to come back. One of the first exercises to practice is "sit and stay." This will prepare your panicky pet for practice departures. Make Spot "sit and stay" while you move from one place to another. If she obeys, give her a treat. If she couldn't stand it and didn't stay, try it again for a shorter time and distance. Once you find something that works (even if it's just moving from the living room to the dining room) you can slowly increase the time and distance. This builds confidence in your pet and this helps them to handle times alone much better.

The next step is to change your habits. Think about your routine. Do you do the same things every time you walk out the door? Kissing your spouse, grabbing your bag, closing your briefcase or even picking up your keys can tell Spot that you're

leaving. She associates your preparations to leave with her destructive behavior.

Your goal is to change your pattern, teaching her new cues that let her know that you're always coming back and help disassociate her learned, destructive behavior from your absence.

Do something unusual and different from your normal routine: turn on the radio or television, or give Spot a treat. There are many toys and treats designed to entertain your pet while you're out. A Kong toy stuffed with food is a popular option--she will spend many



distracted hours working to get the food out.

New Cue Review

Begin using your new cue when you start doing practice departures. The key here is to take baby steps and to be very patient. When you first give Spot the new cue, leave the house for just a minute or two-- a time short enough that you know Spot will be all right.

When you come back, avoid a big fuss and simply go about your



business. The expectation of a big to-do when you come home only increases her anxiety level. Practicing departures does the same thing as the "sit and stay" training; you're teaching Spot that when you leave you will come back. Slowly, you will increase her confidence in you and in herself. Continue to practice your departures all day long for increasingly longer amounts of time. Stay away a couple of minutes longer each time, but remember to take it slow. If Spot becomes upset at a certain point cut the time in half and be patient. For example, if Spot acts out after two hours, then decrease the time to one hour and work your way back up from there. Repeat the cycle over and over again, until Spot is confident that you will always return.

Ideally you will be able to spend at least a week gradually easing Spot into a new level of self-confidence. If

you don't have that much time, try to begin early on a Friday evening and continue the practice departures throughout the weekend. There are new anxiety drugs on the market that can help calm your anxious pup if you don't have enough consecutive hours to work on correcting Spot's behavior. These drugs are not

sedatives; instead, they are designed especially for dogs with separation anxiety. Dogs take a daily dose to relieve

some of their anxiety, making it easier for them to learn new, better behavior. Once the new behavior is learned, the medication can be discontinued. As with any drug, be sure to visit your veterinarian to ensure the medication is appropriate for your specific pet.

Another strategy to help you deal with the problem is to take Spot out for a good walk before you leave the house. Not only will you spend some quality time together, it will also help tucker her out, making it more likely she will spend her time away from you sleeping. Another benefit to the long walk is that once Spot sees the pattern, she will have something to look forward to when you leave. And the exercise will be great for both of you.

With these tools, you should be well on your way to boosting Spot's self-confidence. With enough time and patience you can teach Spot that you love her just as much as she loves you. Eventually she will realize that you won't leave her. Don't be afraid to seek professional help. Ask your veterinarian for suggestions, or if the problem persists, ask your veterinarian to recommend a behavior specialist. Chances are both you and your dog will benefit from some one-on-one guidance. Together, you can transform her anxious love and your tattered home into a secure peace you both can enjoy.

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