



# Separation anxiety and your dog



### **How to cope with a destructive dog**

Dogs are social animals and regard their owners as their pack. When this 'pack' is absent, they become distressed. Most dogs cope with this separation but some do not and develop a disorder called 'separation anxiety'.

Expressions of anxiety in dogs vary from one individual to another - some whine or bark, some lose toilet control, while some become destructive and regress to puppy-like binges of chewing or scratching.

Destructive behaviour seems to provide a satisfying displacement activity or distraction for the anxious or upset dog. It is possible with time, patience and the correct methods to retrain the destructive dog.

### **What can you do?**

In the short term an indoor or outdoor kennel allows a brief respite while allowing time to apply the psychological strategies.

Most of us are especially affectionate or apologetic before leaving our dog alone, with such words as 'Be a good boy' or 'I won't be long', etc. Stop this, and be off-hand and cool so as to reduce the contrast between your presence and the imminent absence.

Change your routine and be unpredictable so your dog does not know your next move, e.g. leave the house by different routes, or return as though to collect a forgotten item.



Leave reminders of your presence. During your absence leave items of clothing, your usual TV or radio channel on, a light on or access to a favourite chair or bed.

Desensitisation involves exposure to brief periods of separation which are gradually increased according to success. This is a slow process because toleration of intervals of separation will vary from day to day.

Reduce the contact between you and your dog. Do not allow the dog to follow you from room to room. Allocate about 30% of your time together with the door closed between you and the dog.

Always be cool and rejecting as you close the door, but warm on reunions (but only once they have settled down). In general you should be less indulgent towards your dog, since to an extent you are to blame for creating his excessive dependency.

The worst single action by the owner of a destructive dog is to return and punish or scold the dog. No matter what has been destroyed, do nothing and behave as though everything was normal. Do not even tidy up or clean up the mess in view of your dog.

## **Problem Avoidance**

### **Breed selection**

Some breeds, e.g. Labradors, are more likely to be destructive than others when left on a regular basis. Crossbreeds may also be very destructive as perhaps they are excessively loving or over-attached.



## Crate-training

Crate-training a puppy is the most effective avoidance procedure available. It keeps the puppy safe from dangerous equipment and encourages it to tolerate separation.

All dogs need ample exercise, a good diet and a secure relationship with their owner for both physical and mental well-being. An absence of any one of these may provoke bizarre behaviour such as destructiveness.

As this is a very complex disorder, we would suggest that you speak to either a vet or a nurse for more information on this matter. Although it is often a very slow process, this behaviour can be improved with the correct training programme. In some cases it may require the use of specially developed medication, particularly in more severe cases of separation anxiety.

*For further information please ask at reception.*