

Is it separation anxiety?

As pack animals and special members of our human families, dogs can react with anxiety when isolated or removed from their owners even for short periods of time.

While most people have heard of separation anxiety the actual condition is not as common as one might think. Boredom, hyperactivity or bad behavior/manners due to a lack of training occur much more commonly but are frequently mislabeled as separation anxiety if symptoms occur while we're away.

In each case the symptoms can be very similar: destructive behavior; continuous barking, whining, howling; uncontrolled elimination; frantic greeting behavior, constantly demanding attention; self mutilation and even aggression. These are some of the most common behavioral reasons dogs are given up or euthanized in our society.

The signs of true separation anxiety in your dog only occur when they are left alone, always occur when left alone and always occur within half an hour of your departure. All three of these conditions need to apply. If the dog rips apart the couch three hours after you leave, only once in a while, or sometimes right in front of you; the issue is something other than separation anxiety.

There is no natural tendency to this disorder by breed, sex or age of the dog. Owners can unwittingly create the disorder in any dog by rarely leaving them home alone. Additionally a problem can occur when there is a strong attachment to one family member that is disrupted by a sudden change in routine. Rescue dogs, because they have been uprooted from their homes and families, can commonly develop separation anxiety.

Individual cases can range from mild to severe. For minor separation anxiety problems, some simple techniques may be helpful. For more severe problems, a progressive desensitization process is most effective, consult with a professional to determine how best to handle your individual dog and circumstances.