

BEHAVIORAL TRAINING:

Simple steps to promote independence and help your dog overcome separation anxiety

BEFORE LEAVING:

- Pay no attention to your dog for 20-30 minutes before you go out.
- When you leave, make it low-key, without elaborate goodbyes. Just walk out the door.
- Leave a special toy or a treat to distract the dog when you go out and remove the item upon your return. Make this something special, like a food-filled treat, so that your leaving is associated with something positive. The treat should also occupy your dog during those critical first moments after your departure.

WHEN RETURNING:

- Ignore your dog until he is quiet and relaxed, then interact on your own initiative. (i.e., don't greet your dog until he stops demanding/begging for you to do so.)
- You may not realize it, but even eye contact can be rewarding to a dog seeking attention. Interact with your dog only when he is quiet, thus rewarding his calm behavior.
- Do not reprimand your dog for destructive behavior or for urinating or defecating in the house. No matter what you find when you come home, remember that your dog could not control himself when you were away. Punishment will not help, and will only increase his anxiety.

AT HOME:

- Interact with your dog only at your initiative and when the dog is relaxed. Again, show your dog that you like to play with him when he's calm and relaxed. To encourage independence, avoid constant physical contact with your dog. Encourage him to lie down near you, but not in contact with you.
- Teach your dog to stay calm as you move away; gradually increase distance and time away.
- Put your coat on or play with your keys at times other than departure. (Certain cues tell your dog that you're getting ready to leave. When he sees these, he begins to panic. This technique will help him become indifferent to those cues.)

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