

Management of separation anxiety

Step	Description
Reward independence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach independence by having your dog rest on a bed or mat with no physical contact. Give treats or toys to keep your dog occupied and gradually increase the length of time and then move further away (ideally into a different room) • Provide structured interactions. Only give the pet attention when it is calm. Ignore attention-seeking behavior until the dog lies down or goes to its mat (see client handout H13) • Use the same rule structure for all rewards – give treats, play toys, food, play only if the dog sits or lies down. Gradually train a longer sit, down, or stay before any reward given • The goal is to have the dog learn to cease all attention-seeking and to sit, lie down, or go to its bed or mat before any reward is given • When your dog approaches for attention, you can use cue words or commands to train your dog to sit, lie down, or go to its mat; however, until these are effectively learned you could: (1) ignore your dog until it offers the behavior; (2) lure the pet with a food or toy reward; or (3) use a head halter to prompt the behavior gently. A clicker or Manners Minder can aid in immediately rewarding and shaping gradually more settled behavior in a select location • Practice each day to increase gradually the length of time your dog settles before rewards are given
Never punish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Punishment will increase fear and anxiety
Departure cues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expose your dog to the cues that are usually associated with departure, e.g., lifting keys, putting on coat, open and shut doors, open garage door without departing until the dog habituates (i.e., these cues no longer predict departure) • Adapt your dog to the departure routine while you are at home (e.g., leaving in crate or kitchen) so that it no longer predicts departure • Depart when your dog is occupied for 15–20 minutes (e.g., special toys, mat, music) and avoid exposing to cues (e.g., go out different door, avoid garage door by keeping car in driveway). Leave unnoticed • Cues that are commonly associated with calmness and your presence might reduce anxiety, e.g., TV, radio, DVD left on
Greetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homecomings should be kept very low-key and your pet should be ignored until it is calm
Social/exercise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide interactive times regularly throughout the day to ensure sufficient aerobic exercise, social time, play, and additional training • Before training inattention and independence, ensure sufficient social time, play, and aerobic exercise have first been provided • Maintain structure and predictability by consistently training the pet that sit, down–stay, or going to its bed (and not attention soliciting) are the behaviors that must be displayed before any reward is given

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Departure training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After your dog has been desensitized to the departure cues, practice short mock departures • The mock departure is a trial for actual departures so give exercise and social time, then take your dog to its resting area, and give high-value toys. Use a unique cue. Add a special non-departure cue that is unique to these training sessions (such as music, CD or a sign on the door) so that the pet learns when to remain calm. After 15–20 minutes, while the dog is resting and occupied, leave for anywhere from a few seconds to a few minutes and return. The duration should be shorter than the time in which it takes the pet to show signs of anxiety. Periods can be lengthened gradually as the pet responds without associated anxiety • The duration of departure should be lengthened on a variable schedule, so that the pet cannot predict exactly how long the owner will be gone. Use the special (non-departure) cues to predict these short departures (and not for actual departures)
Distractions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give highly stimulating toys and chews 15–20 minutes prior to departure and take up when home. Give these toys and chews only when practicing independence training, mock departures, and actual departures, but give the highest value and greatest number for actual departures • In rare situations, having another pet will provide a playmate or distraction
Confinement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confining your pet may result in increased anxiety unless the pet is accustomed to confinement while you are at home (crate, child gate, room, pen, tied down). Acclimating the pet to confinement should be done gradually using food and chew toys. Allowing your pet to choose its own desirable resting site and then rewarding its use can improve compliance
Pheromones/ drugs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fluoxetine a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI) or clomipramine a tricyclic antidepressant are licensed products for dogs that have demonstrated efficacy in conjunction with a behavior program or 2 to 4 months. Other SSRI's or TCA's might be an alternative but no trials have been done to validate efficacy. • Dog-appeasing pheromone Adaptil (formerly DAP) might be beneficial alone or together with drugs. • Benzodiazepines, such as alprazolam and diazepam, clonidine, or trazodone, might be used concurrently with SSRIs on an as-needed basis prior to departures but use of these drugs is off label • Selegiline might be considered for chronic anxiety disorders but not concurrently with SSRIs or TCAs
Monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To assess the pet's behavior when out of sight or away from home, monitor with a video recorder or monitor (e.g., PetCam)