



by Judi Burton

Separation Anxiety

“Are You Leaving Me Alone Again?”

Have you ever thought about what your canine companion is thinking when you’re getting ready to leave the house? He or she is probably thinking something like this:

I know what my human is about to do and am very upset about it. She is putting on her “fur” and walking around with purpose. Those high-pitched sounds she makes to me means she is trying to make me feel better, but it’s not working. The tinkling of those shiny things that holds that metal object that starts the big cold monster out front are in her forepaws, and, OH NO, she is putting on her “paw covers.” You know, the ones that have a mixed aroma of dead animal skin and her. She is hugging and kissing and petting me, and that normally feels very good, but not now, when I know she is leaving. She is walking to the opening of the den, and now she’s gone.

I am so sad and feel so alone. Everything is quiet. I think about eating, but what’s the point if she is not here to watch me and keep me company while I eat? I think about sleeping, and while I know it is probably the best thing I can do, I am too nervous. What if she doesn’t come back this time? What if someone comes and takes me back to the place with all the other left-behind dogs? I sniff around for something that smells like her. Her other “paw covers” are over by the bed. They will taste good and will remind me of

her. She might get mad, but I’ll be happy for a while, and when she comes back to yell at me, I’ll be happy because she came back. I think I’ll try the door first. My teeth marks are already in it, and I think I’ve almost got the hang of turning that round metal thing in my mouth like she does with her strange forepaws. If I can just get out, I can find her, because I’m sure she is not very far away. My fears are welling up inside and I need to let out a great howl to tell her I’m here—a cry to let her know I am not okay and need her to come back.

Unfortunately, thousands of dogs experience this ritual daily. It causes great stress in their lives as well as in those of the owners. I know from firsthand experience what it is like to open the door and see my favorite pair of sandals ripped to shreds under the nose of my very guilty puppy. But the cost of those sandals is not as important as my relationship with my dog and his happiness. There are many ways to create a more secure and peaceful feeling for your dog than coddling and petting him or her just before you leave the house. In fact, it may be what initiates the separation anxiety that your dog experiences.

Dog’s Home Within the Home

Crate training is a great way to teach your dog that it is okay to be left alone. The crate creates a den-like atmosphere that

is instinctual for a canine. Cover it with blankets that smell like you to create a safe place. Get him used to it and never use it as a form of punishment. In time, your dog will go to the crate on his or her own when he or she senses you are getting ready for departure.

Exercise

Some people ignore their dog 10 minutes before leaving and after returning, but this is very hard for most owners. Other ways of calming your pooch include feeding and exercising him or her before you leave. A tired dog is a happy dog.

Herbal Calm

If your dog is still having severe issues, herbal remedies can be used. Marci Clow, MS, RD, who has been a formulator for 11 years with Green Dog Naturals Herbal Supplements, suggests chamomile, lavender and valerian, which all have calming effects on dogs, as well as humans. The company's product Complete Calm, for dogs, can be found at many local pet stores.

Doggy Daycare

Some may consider leaving their dog at one of the pet boarding centers on the Strand, where they get attention, play and exercise during the day. This might be ideal if you'll be away for an unusually long day, but as an everyday solution, might be prohibitively expensive.

Pet Sitting Service

Another option is having a professional pet sitter come to your home to take your dog for a walk and/or keep him or her company.

Thundershirt

The new product called the Thundershirt is a snug-fitting coat, which uses pressure points and swaddling to dramatically reduce anxiety, and requires no special training. This is recommended for owners who may have thought they would need to resort to pharmaceutical remedies for their anxious dog. The swaddling shirt can be found at Pet Galley in Murrells Inlet. "The Thundershirt was based on a remedy

used for horses for many years," relates Judy Bauknight at Pet Galley. "They would use an Ace bandage wrapped around the horse's belly, and it calmed them right down. One of my customers used it for her dog that was terrified to ride in the car. After the first 20 minutes of anxiety, her dog lay down and slept through the rest of the drive to Alabama."

Understandably, rescue dogs are more susceptible to separation anxiety than others, because most have already been abandoned before. This is why it is very important to learn the right way of leaving your newly adopted pet before behavior and anxiety get out of hand, and before you consider giving up and taking your dog back to that terrifying shelter. If you follow these steps and consult your vet first, you'll be coming home to a happy pup glad to see you, with your house in perfect order and your sandals still intact.

For more info about Thundershirt, contact Judy Bauknight at Pet Galley, 4905 A Hwy 17 Bypass, Murrells Inlet, at 843-651-8644. See ad this page.

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