



What to do to prevent the start of Separation Anxiety

This is some basic information of what to do and what not to do when you first add a new dog to your family.

The first major DO NOT is over fuss the dog or spoil them. I know that it's so hard not to BUT you need the dog to find their own feet around the house and settle happily without becoming too dependent on yourself. Basically, for the first few days be hands off and if you already have existing dogs let the new dog take the lead from them. As they settle in, you really want to promote independence.

Make sure the dog has a quiet place they can go to over the first few days. A crate can be a good idea, set up in another room away from the hustle and bustle of the other dogs, the children, etc. However, some dogs hate crates and will become incredibly stressed and panic stricken. So never force them into a crate. Some are far more at ease on a comfy sofa – just bear in mind in a new environment, their stress levels and uncertainty may provoke destructive behaviour/chewing. So please remove anything of any value or harm to your dog. And please don't be angry at them. They are simply trying to soothe themselves. If you do invest in a crate, please don't go for the cheap options. We strongly advise **SAVIC RESIDENCE CRATE, XL** size is best. Remember the dog is going to be confused at first and things will seem strange. The dog may choose not to take themselves off and settle but if they do want time out and you have provided the bolt hole.

If you don't have other dogs in the house then it is even more important to encourage independence. If you don't do this you could end up with problems resulting in separation issues. Stairgates are great tools, as you can fix onto a door frame of a room where the dog is, allowing you to move in and out of the room, whilst the dog can still see you and hear you. Some dogs can and do jump, so it might be a good idea to get an extra high one which you can find on Amazon.

From the very first day the dog arrives with you, try and give them some time alone during the course of every day. You want to do this in very short sessions and slowly build up. If they are becoming worried, then you need to decrease the time they are left. Use the bolt hole tactic again and find one room with a smallish space (i.e. kitchen), provide a bed and feed the dog there also. Top tip is DO NOT shut a door on the dog, if dogs have been locked away previously, or don't understand a solid door they are likely to freak out. Shut doors usually result in manic scratching, blind panic and damage.

Start by placing your dog into the kitchen or safe area for as little as 1 minute (if the dog is already displaying problems when left) - if the dog does the minute without whining then great, open the gate, do not say a word and let the dog out. If they do all right with one minute try two, up to five and so on and so forth. Do this on the hour every hour.

For dogs who aren't displaying problems start with five to ten minutes and continue pushing up the time. Remember consistency is the name of the game, don't get complacent - your dog needs to gain confidence and feel secure.

If your dog is already showing signs of stressing after as little as two minutes and starts to howl/whine/bark, see if it subsides. If it doesn't then remain calm, go and open the gate. Don't engage with the dog, just carry on as normal. You will need to build up the time far more slowly. Maybe even a few seconds at a time! So alter the routine maybe – take the dog on a nice, leisurely, sniffy walk before trying the time out this time. The calmer the walk the better. If you are throwing a ball or they are running around frenetically, then you are likely to have a hyped up dog on your hands. When you get back from your calm walk, feed your dog in the safe space (with dog bed in it) and then leave them in there and see if they settle. If they do then great, if they doze off even better. If not, then the next time you do this, make sure you let them out BEFORE they start to whine.

Sometimes people carry out these methods and everything is going swimmingly then the following Monday I receive a call from the owner to say that they have returned to work and the dog has struggled again. Why might this be? Because the weekend they have spent the whole time with the dog. The first few weekends of new dog ownership need to be kept to the routine - time out during the day. If you have the dog settling with your work routine, make sure you still leave the dog alone for an hour or two morning and afternoon Saturday and Sunday for the first few weeks.

I hope this helps to explain and although it may be tiring to begin with it will lead to a happier, healthier dog with a better relationship with the family and other members of the dog pack

HELP! My dog has full blown SA!

Now for the dog with fully blown SA. They follow you everywhere, and if they can't be near you, they whine/howl/bark/pace/toilet/destroy. The most obvious reason is the dog is confused and stressed.

Start to think from your dog's point of view not your own, he/she doesn't understand why sometimes when you get up to leave, you put on your shoes, you pick up your car keys, and you place on your coat, he/she gets to come but other times you leave them behind. They are also in a new environment and everything is a bit strange to them.

You should only work to the capacity your dog can cope with. It can be a very long and exasperating process so please do not expect this to go away overnight. In some cases, you will need professional guidance.

Things you may need to help deal with SA:

1 tall dog gate

Rescue Remedy (chemist)

Dorwest Valerian and Skullcap Tablets

Dap Diffuser (vets)

Possibly a Pet Interactive Camera (selection on Amazon)

Heaps of patience!

Be creative – sometimes leaving a radio on helps (something not too chaotic, maybe a talking channel), try them with some licky mats, kongs or some treats in a toilet roll innard. Leaving them with a piece of your clothing, which smells of you, can help to alleviate symptoms.

If you have made it to 30 seconds, then bravo - keep going and be prepared that the dog may go backwards. But when you first start to leave a dog with SA even for a minute there are steps you need to complete before leaving. The dog needs to become desensitized to the sequence of your leaving. So, first you need to break it all down. First, you need to go towards the door and back again. Do this over the course of the day, for a number of days. When they are at the stage of remaining calm, then you can up the ante, go towards the door and open the latch (thus desensitizing them to the sound cue), again do this repeatedly during the day for a few days. Then maybe go back and revisit the walking to the door step, then back to the sound cue. And so on and so forth. To your dog, these actions need to become normal and less of a worry.

When you leave the house for the first time, you need to make your absence short and come back straight away. Build up the time gradually. Just wait outside the front door. If whilst you are listening outside the dog barks or whines, don't go back into the house immediately - wait and listen to see if they settle down. If they settle, return calmly.

It may escalate. It is unfair and counterproductive to leave a dog in a stressed state. Their stress levels may well induce panic and then they will associate your absence even more with severe anxiety. So, take a deep breath or several and enter CALMLY. Remaining calm is so important as your dog has shown signs of stress so you certainly don't want them to be picking up on your stress as well. Perhaps you have moved too fast with the training. So, go back a step or two.

If your dog cannot cope with being left in a different room to you for long (or at all), then they will certainly not be able to cope with you leaving the house. So leave home absences out of the equation and if you do need to go out, then see if you can get a sitter. Over the next few days, continue with the desensitization.

The main results in SA dogs are maintained with consistency, do not think *oh okay, after three days he has been fine, all sorted now!* – stick with the routine. This is something the whole family needs to keep up; children, in laws, dog walkers, whoever. Also, if you return home and the dog has soiled, damaged whatever DO NOT reprimand them and do not use the training/safe area as somewhere to place the dog for punishment! Not rocket science but they will no longer feel safe and secure there, plus they will have no idea what they have done wrong.

You may feel you are getting nowhere and it can be an incredibly frustrating and testing time. If you need further help and advice then we can put you in touch with our recommended trainers and behaviourists, who can offer a discount as a Suki's adopter.