

How do you know your pet has Separation Anxiety?

It's not just our kids that experience back-to-school blues after summer vacation... did you know our pets could be affected, too?

Any big change in routine can cause separation anxiety in pets. It's estimated that 20% of the 80 million dogs in the country are actually affected by separation anxiety. That number actually goes up with senior dogs – up to 29-50% are affected.

Watch for Behavior Changes in Three Key Areas:

1. The first is improper urination or defecation in the house that's not associated with puppy or kitten training.
2. The second would be excessive barking or howling.
3. The third that we often see is excessive chewing or destructive behavior at home

What can I do to ease my pet's anxiety?

1. Set up a Rhythm

Once school starts, try to set up a routine. If you can leave and return at the same time every day, that will help your pet adjust to the new rhythm they're experiencing in your home.

2. Schedule Play Time

Set up designated play and engagement time with your pet each day. "This is where appropriate treating can come into play. We want to make sure that we reward the good behaviors we're seeing and discourage the bad behaviors. And that's where a nice treat here or there, along with verbal, praise can go a long way.

3. Turn up the Music

To keep your pet engaged throughout the day, leave some music on when you leave the house.

4. Stimulate Your Pet With Puzzle Games

A great way to reduce anxiety during the day is to use puzzle feeders to keep your pet mentally stimulated. Pour half of your pet's recommended daily amount of food into the puzzle feeder each morning and then refill again in the evening. Your pet will spend the day playing and keeping active.

5. Try a Game of Hide-And-Seek

Another option is to separate the daily amount of dry food into small bowls and hide them around the house, "Measure out the right amount that you want to feed every day and then divide out little portions of that into little quantities hidden around the house, says veterinary Dr. Zara Boland. This game of hide-and-seek with the food is particularly helpful for cats as it causes prey-stimulating behavior that will keep them busy throughout the day.

6. Have To Leave Suddenly?

If you don't have time to prep a cognitive game for your pet before you leave the house, try a long lasting treat like the "Busy Bone" from Purina, to keep your dog stimulated.

7. Get Moving

Exercise can help reduce the anxiety of a new routine. Take your dog for a walk or play an interactive game with you ca to get the pet moving.