These are the key components to incorporate or understand when working with separation anxiety. Unlike with most listicles, you must approach this list as a whole; picking and choosing won’t work. But don’t let that scare you. Many dog guardians have successfully resolved separation anxiety by following protocols that recognize and uphold these Top 10 principles. It truly can be done.

1. Separation Anxiety Is A Panic Disorder

Dogs in the clutches of this condition are not being disobedient or spiteful despite the guilty look many guardians claim to see when they arrive home. Dogs suffering from separation anxiety are experiencing the equivalent of a panic attack every time they are left alone. For more, see Logic Doesn’t Apply to Separation Anxiety

2. Management Is Key

Putting a dog through continued anxiety by leaving her alone regularly or even on occasion will not allow the dog to make progress. Yes, I’m saying you have to safeguard the dog from experiencing anxiety during your training, and yes, this is a tall order. It is not an impossible request, however, and it is an imperative one. See Management Is Key
3. Not Relying on Food Toys

This is a surprising topic for many, but read on and it might make sense. It is often recommended that we use interactive feeding toys when working with separation anxiety. The problem with this is that most dogs will finish the food and then immediately begin to get anxious. That is, if they will engage with the food at all. Instead, use a process of systematic training to teach the dog to be left alone in small increments without relying on this initial crutch. See Comfort Food

4. Confinement Might Not Be The Solution

Another common recommendation is to use a crate or small room with a gate for confining a dog with separation anxiety. While this is not necessarily the wrong way to proceed, it is incredibly important to be aware that many dogs with separation anxiety also suffer from confinement anxiety. In such cases a crate or baby-gated area would exacerbate the problem. A thorough assessment of what is best for the dog is what’s needed.

5. Stay At Or Beneath Threshold

A dog’s threshold is defined as the place wherein the dog is still comfortable or not experiencing anxiety when left alone. Dogs display many body language indicators that show us when they are starting to experience anxiety. Most are pre-cursors to more obvious things like barking or destruction. Separation anxiety training should remain at, or preferably under, this threshold in order to make the most progress. See Separation Anxiety Body Language Literacy

6. Use Technology To Watch

Because it is so important to work within that threshold we need a way to watch the dog when left alone. Fortunately, technology has given us effective and widely available tools, including many free apps accessible on smartphones and easy programs via webcams. See A Little Tech Yields Big Benefits

7. Why Working With A Qualified Trainer Can Help

The process of overcoming separation anxiety is simple, but it’s not easy. A qualified trainer can guide you through the process step by step and keep you motivated as twists and turns come up. Creating almost daily incremental criteria steps is the cornerstone of separation anxiety training and a qualified trainer can do this based on carefully reading the dog’s body language. See On Separation Anxiety

8. Why Talking With Your Vet Can Help

Separation anxiety should be clinically diagnosed but other factors can be involved when a dog reacts anxiously. Your vet can rule out possibilities like pain or underlying health
issues. Depending on the situation, medication can sometimes be very useful as an adjunct to behavior modification.

9. Don’t Panic At Set-Backs

Because we are dealing with an anxiety disorder, we have to accept that the learning process will never be a completely straight line. At times regressions happen or plateaus occur and that is entirely normal. Expect them, know they are part of the process; it’s just information gathering as you move forward. Don’t panic, take it slow, and forward progress will again happen. If you feel like you have hit a wall, remind yourself what’s possible with a success story from the trenches Our Separation Anxiety Journey – It Can Be Done.

10. How Long Will It Take To Resolve

This is understandably the most common question trainers are asked. The answer is that every dog is a little different so patience is required. But the time and perseverance will be richly rewarded when you and your beloved dog are living a stress-free life. Fortunately, the severity of the case doesn’t necessarily indicate how long or difficult the resolution of the problem will be. For a more in-depth understanding, read this blog How Serious Is It And Does It Matter.

The most important thing to know is that there is hope and there is help. Separation anxiety is a disorder that affects a significant percentage of dogs. The more professionals who become educated about it and work closely with guardians to overcome it, the more success we’ll see. Work in small increments, be patient, have great empathy, and celebrate the small successes along the way. There will be many. Resolving separation anxiety is one of the most rewarding experiences and you will never look back with regret on the accomplishment.

This blog was originally posted on Smart Animal Training Systems

Share this:

•

• inShare 0

•

• Email

Filed Under: General, Separation Anxiety
About Malena DeMartini
Malena DeMartini is the author of Treating Separation Anxiety in Dogs (Dogwise Publishing) and the founder of the Separation Anxiety Certification Program. Her upcoming lectures and conferences can be found on her website at www.malenademartini.com/for-trainers/books-workshops/