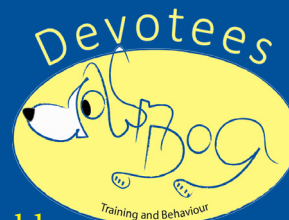


Down Dog Digest

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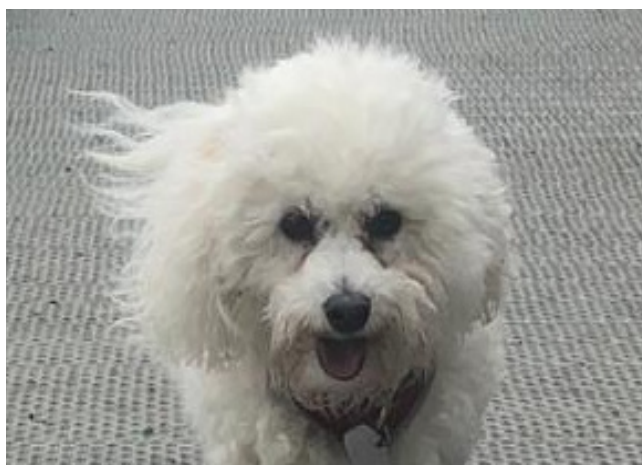
Carol's Challenge: Find out what your dog does when left alone

Does your dog hate being left alone?

Is he naughty or anxious?

Does your dog hate being left alone? Lily, an eighteen month old Bichon Frise, certainly did.

Lily would run away when her owners tried to get her into the kitchen, so they would have to chase after her and pick her up to be able to shut her in.



As soon as the owners left, Lily jumped excessively at the kitchen door, work surfaces and the table, crying and whining. She scratched at and chewed the kitchen door, chairs and table. She paced around and was unable to settle at all. When her owners returned, Lily's face and feet were all wet and her greetings were totally over the top. Poor Lily was suffering from separation anxiety.

Separation problems are distressing for both you and your dog. Dogs with this problem show exaggerated signs of anxiety when they don't have access to their owners, whether because

the owner is out of the home or even when the owner is in another part of the house and the dog is stopped from reaching them.

It's a fairly common problem – around 14-17% of dogs are affected. There are no appreciable differences between male and female dogs, but mixed breeds, rescue dogs and the companion breeds are slightly more likely to suffer from the problem.

Multiple instances of re-homing – or sometimes just one - can trigger separation problems. Other contributing factors include the dog suffering from a severe illness or malnutrition during puppyhood, if the puppy was the only one in a litter, or if the puppy was removed from the litter too young.

But the most important triggers are human factors. It's common to see separation related problems in dogs when owners have been at home for maternity leave, or after they take an extended vacation.

Perhaps the owner has to return to work after time off to care for a new dog, but they haven't trained the animal to be comfortable left alone. Other factors include moving to a new home, after a kennel stay, if there are altered social relationships such as a new baby, a new pet, or a death in the family, or any other traumatic event.

Although rare, a medical or cognitive problem, such as seizures or dementia, can trigger or present as separation problems -

Does your dog hate being left alone?

always ask your vet to check your pet if you see any odd behaviour.

The recent coronavirus lockdown worried me and other behaviourists because we knew we were going to see many more cases of separation problems as life started to return to normal.

During lockdown, many dogs thought Christmas had come early. They were accustomed to months or years of being left at home all day, alone. Suddenly, their humans were present all day.



Perhaps your dog lies beside you as you tap away on your computer and she curls up by your feet under the desk. Perhaps you allow her to sleep in your bedroom (or heaven forbid, even your bed). Perhaps your dog follows you everywhere you go, so you can't even have a wee in peace.

Perhaps your dog paces round, getting under your feet as you prepare to leave the house, then he tries to push through the door as you walk out. When left he barks, whines or howls, or shakes and shivers, or drools excessively, makes messes, or chews and destroys things.

It's important to make sure what you're seeing is indeed separation anxiety. For example, barking may be due to several other causes, or lack of crate or house training can lead to the dog making messes when left.

One common misinterpretation by owners is where their dogs are under-stimulated or under-exercised – the owner returns to a house turned upside down and assumes it's a

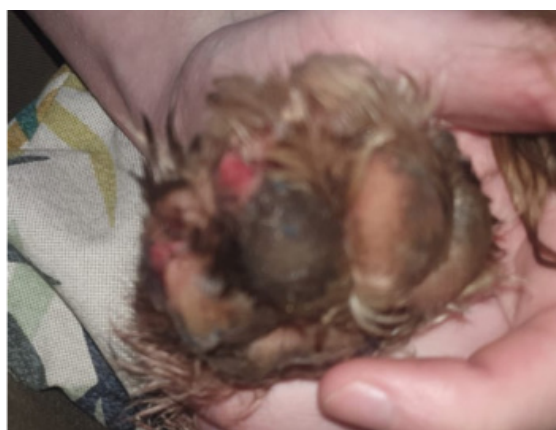
separation problem. But most of these dogs are just bored and need more work to do.



The majority of dogs who are not happy being left alone fall into the mild category. These dogs show some of the symptoms I've mentioned but they will eat when alone and they are generally able to settle down and rest. Dogs with true separation anxiety can't. It's the doggy equivalent of a panic attack.

These dogs shadow their owners every move. They will commonly not eat treats when left alone. Pacing, barking and whining are constant and the destruction is worse and focused on points of entry such as windows and doors. There are often associated problems such as sweaty paws, panting and eliminations. The excessive greetings on owner return may last for several minutes.

Severe cases are thankfully rare. Symptoms include self-mutilation, especially the front paws and legs or the tail tip or base.



These poor dogs may do themselves significant damage trying to escape - broken teeth and nails and lacerations, and they may shed excessively.

What can I do about it?

How to help your anxious dog

It's common for people to focus on trying to stop the symptoms - but you need to deal with the problem itself, not the symptoms. Focusing on stopping the barking, or howling, or preventing any damage or destruction doesn't help the underlying problem.

Here's the most important thing to know. Helping your dog will take time - there aren't any overnight fixes, nor is there a magic wand you can wave. You have to do the work.

Here are three tips to prevent separation problems. These three tips will also help if your dog is already struggling when left alone.

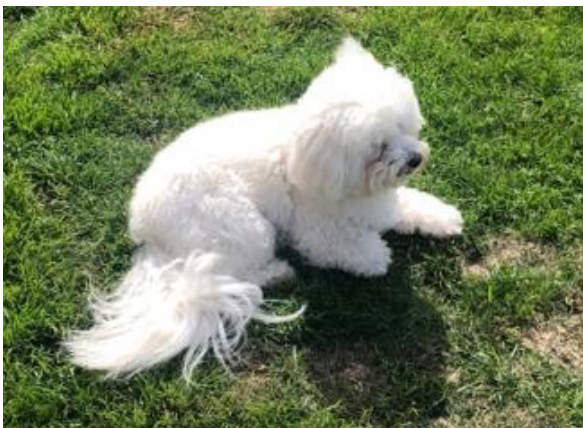
Tip 1: You need to give your dog some alone time every day.

If you're at home all day, this may mean you going out to do some outside maintenance or gardening, or anything else outside while your dog stays in the house.

Perhaps you can take a short trip out in the car without your dog, or take a short walk alone, leaving him in the house. Whatever suits you and your circumstances.

Tip 2: Don't allow your dog to shadow you everywhere in the house.

Shut the toilet door to stop your dog following you in. Close other doors, such as the kitchen door when you're making meals, or shut your dog outside while you're in the house (if safe).



You could use barriers such as baby gates, or

use a crate for your dog for short periods, or put your dog in a puppy pen. Anything that prevents your dog following you round all the time is good.

Tip 3: encourage your dog to rest and get enough sleep. Set them up in a comfy bed well away from you, such as in a covered crate or even better, in a separate room.



Dogs generally sleep for between 12 and 16 hours a day, which means giving them regular quiet times to relax and snooze, at least a couple of times each day.

But what if your dog already gets distressed when you leave them? Helping dogs with separation problems is a welfare issue - vital for their own mental health (and yours). Please seek professional behaviour help.

The good news is that around 75% of dogs can be cured and the rest can be helped to cope better. Just remember:

1. It's not personal - your dog isn't trying to spite you. They can't control their anxiety.
2. Logic doesn't apply - just because you know you are coming back, your dog doesn't. And they will never "get over it" if you don't do anything - in fact, most dogs get worse.
3. Punishing your dog is pointless - it will only make things worse. They can't help it.
4. Treatment takes time. Changing behaviour is a slow and gradual process that will yield results over time. Please ask for help - our contact details are overleaf.

Carol's Challenge

Each issue I'm going to set you a challenge.

This time your challenge, should you wish to accept it, is to find out how your dog behaves when you leave them.

Here's how:

- Plan to go out for around 20-30 minutes.
- Set up your phone, iPad/tablet or video camera in a place where you'll be able to see your dog, even if they move round the room - on a kitchen cabinet, mantelpiece or TV stand



- There's a useful app called Alfred which will let you link your phone so you can see what's going on
- Make a note of any and all behaviours your dog shows, how long after you leave they occur and how many/long they last for

Most dogs settle down and sleep within 10 or 15 minutes at most. If your dog can't relax or shows any behaviours that worry you, get in touch.

Serene Separations Masterclass

Separation problems are distressing for both you and your dog. You'll both be suffering - but you can do something about it.

Over two sessions, our Serene Separation Masterclass will give you practical advice you can follow to prevent possible separation problems. We'll also show you how to help your dog step-by-step if they're already suffering separation distress.

This online course will teach you:

- What preventative or remedial training you need to practice
- How to teach your dog to be comfortable and relax when left alone
- How to measure and monitor progress

It's a practical course and you'll need to do the work. Through your workbook diary and reports I'll be able to make sure you are making progress - and we'll tweak things where necessary to make sure everyone is confident in what to do and how to do it.

If you'd like more details, please get in touch via email or visit our website:

<https://www.downdog.co.uk>

We hope you've enjoyed this Down Dog Digest. Please feel free to share it with any friends, neighbours or family members you think might find it interesting,

Sign up for Carol's regular emails, giving you all sorts of free information on training, behaviour and other doggy-related topics here: <https://www.downdog.co.uk/signup>

If you'd like more information, tips, and advice about owning, training, caring for and enjoying your dog more, check out our website www.downdog.co.uk. Visit the blog and download our free helpsheets on a wide range of topics. Get it right from the start with your new pup, book group or one to one training, and check out our Down Dog Devotee membership programme to have fun with like minded owners.

If you've got a Problem Pooch, why not visit the Doggy Doctor's Surgery for help, in person or online www.doggydoctor.co.uk.