Separation Anxiety Training Stages

Separation problems are distressing for both the owner and the dog. Treatment is essential – it's a welfare issue – for both of you! Curing separation anxiety can take a long time and a huge effort. Three out of every four dogs can be cured, and the problem will be much improved in the remainder. Doing the work as soon as possible to help your dog to be comfortable being left alone is vital. Remember: behaviour never stays the same – it generally gets worse if early signs are ignored.

Separation anxiety arises from emotional distress and the behaviours that ensue are not under any sort of voluntary control by the dog, so basic training, although beneficial to every dog in many ways, will not help with this problem.

The programme is tough – but we're here to support you every step of the way.

RULES

Try to do at least one practice most days, preferably split into several mini sessions. Use high quality treats, no bigger than petit pois size.

Your dog must be calm, relaxed and happy at each stage before moving on to the next.

Always go back a stage if your dog seems to be struggling at any time.

And remember:

While doing this training, it is VITAL that your dog is NEVER left alone.

If you need to go out during this training, please find a neighbour, friend or even a dog sitter or walker to be with and provide company for your dog.

VITAL: Please keep a daily diary of your progress. Use it as a journal too to help manage your own emotions and the inevitable frustration. Looking back to see that progress is happening is important. Check in with us regularly about any issues by email whenever you need

The training is in ten stages:

Stages 1-5 teach your dog to be relaxed when in/on their bed ("go to" and relax)

Stages 6-8 build up their confidence in being left alone

Stages 9 and 10 practice going out and increasing the time your dog is left for, up to three hours.

Contact us if you are struggling or need more advice at any time.

STAGE ONE: Start right by bed/mat/crate

1. Lure your dog onto their bed/mat /crate using hand gesture, reward well (5 times).
2. Add verbal cue (your choice) with a hand gesture (e.g. point), reward well
3. Ask for "go to", count 2 seconds, praise and reward
4. Ask for "go to" count four seconds, praise and reward
5. Ask for "go to" take one step back and return, praise and reward
6. Ask for "go to" take one step back and return, praise and reward
7. Ask for "go to" count three seconds, praise and reward
8. Ask for "go to" one step to right and return, praise and reward
9. Ask for "go to" one step to left and return, praise and reward
10. Ask for "go to" count three seconds, praise and reward
11. Ask for "go to" one step to right and return, praise and reward
12. Ask for "go to" one step to left and return, praise and reward
13. Ask for "go to" count three seconds, praise and reward
14. Ask for "go to" two steps back and return, praise and reward
15. Ask for "go to" count five seconds, praise and reward
16. Ask for "go to" turn your back then turn back, praise and reward
17. Ask for "go to" count two seconds, praise and reward
18. Ask for "go to" clap hands softly once, praise and reward
19. Ask for "go to" three steps back and return, praise and reward
20. Ask for "go to" count to five out loud, praise and reward
21. Ask for "go to" clap hands softly twice, praise and reward
22. Ask for "go to" count to ten out loud, praise and reward
23. Ask for "go to" turn your back then turn back, praise and reward
24. Ask for "go to" clap hands softly three times, praise and reward
25. Ask for "go to" count three seconds, praise and reward
26. Ask for "go to" turn your back, walk one small step forward, then turn and go back, praise and reward
27. Ask for "go to" count five seconds, praise and reward
28. Ask for "go to" count three seconds, praise and reward

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STAGE TWO: By mat/crate

1. Cue your dog onto their mat /crate, reward well.
2. Ask for "go to", count three seconds, praise and reward
3. Ask for "go to" count five seconds, praise and reward
4. Ask for "go to" take three steps back and return, praise and reward
5. Ask for "go to" turn your back then turn back, praise and reward
6. Ask for "go to" take five steps back and return, praise and reward
7. Ask for "go to" count two seconds, praise and reward
8. Ask for "go to" three steps to right and return, praise and reward
9. Ask for "go to" three steps to left and return, praise and reward
10. Ask for "go to" count three seconds, praise and reward
11. Ask for "go to" turn your back, take one step to the right, turn back, praise and reward
12. Ask for "go to" turn your back, take one step to the left, turn back, praise and reward
13. Ask for "go to" count seven seconds, praise and reward
14. Ask for "go to" count two seconds, praise and reward
15. Ask for "go to" turn your back, walk three steps away return, praise and reward
16. Ask for "go to" count one second, praise and reward
17. Ask for "go to" count one second, praise and reward
18. Ask for "go to" count three seconds, praise and reward
19. Ask for "go to" count one second, praise and reward
20. Ask for "go to" turn your back, walk three steps away return, praise and reward
21. "go to" count one second, praise and reward
22. "go to" turn your back, count five seconds, turn back praise and reward
23. "go to" count two seconds, praise and reward
24. "go to" clap hands softly twice, praise and reward
25. "go to" sit on chair, get back up, praise and reward
26. "go to" count out loud to five, praise and reward
27. "go to" clap hands softly twice, praise and reward
28. "go to" walk one step past dog (behind dog), return and reward
29. "go to" count one second, praise and reward
30. Ask for "go to" count ten seconds, praise and reward jackpot (10 treats one after another)

STAGE THREE: Start by mat/crate

1. "go to", count three seconds, praise and reward
2. "go to" take five steps away and return, praise and reward
3. "go to", count three seconds, praise and reward
4. "go to", count seven seconds, praise and reward
5. "go to" walk to slightly out of view (past sofa or down utility room step), praise and reward
6. "go to", count two seconds, praise and reward
7. "go to" three steps to right and return, praise and reward
8. "go to" three steps to left and return, praise and reward
9. "go to", count twelve seconds, praise and reward
10. "go to", count three seconds, praise and reward
11. "go to", count one second, praise and reward
12. "go to", count three seconds, praise and reward
13. "go to" walk to part out of view place for two seconds, praise and reward
14. "go to" count three seconds, praise and reward
15. "go to", move to cupboard and open door (or pick TV remote up in sitting room), praise and reward
16. "go to", count seven seconds, praise and reward
17. "go to", count two seconds, praise and reward
18. stay" walk to part out of view place count out loud three seconds, praise and reward
19. "go to" count two seconds, praise and reward
20. "go to" count ten seconds, praise and reward
21. "go to" walk to part out of view place for two seconds, praise and reward
22. "go to" count one second, praise and reward
23. "go to" count five seconds, praise and reward
24. "go to" turn your back, count ten seconds, turn back praise and reward
25. "go to" count two seconds, praise and reward
26. "go to" move around (jumping jacks?!) three seconds, praise and reward
27. "go to" sit down on chair, get back up, praise and reward
28. "go to" count two seconds, praise and reward
29. "go to" sit down on chair two seconds, get back up, praise and reward
30. "go to" count ten seconds, praise and reward
31. "go to" clap hands loudly twice, praise and reward
32. "go to" walk to part out of view place count out loud for five seconds, praise and reward
33. "go to" count five seconds, praise and reward
34. "go to" take three steps away and return, praise and reward
35. ""go to", move to cupboard and open door (or pick TV remote or magazine up in sitting room), praise and reward
36. "go to" take five steps away and return, praise and reward
37. stay" count fifteen seconds, praise and reward jackpot (10 treats one after another)

STAGE FOUR

Continue along these lines, mixing up the movements and times, until you can get a FIFTEEN second "go to" from FIVE feet away

Remember: Random Rewards Rock – always use a Random Reward Routine.

Write out your own schedule below:

STAGE FIVE

Then build gradually to THIRTY seconds TEN feet away using a Random Rewards Routine (write it out below)

Stages six to ten: Building Confidence

PLEASE NOTE: During these stages, make sure your dog is settled and content at each level before moving onto the next. If not, stay at that level until s/he is comfortable. Hang out with them for a while (20-30 seconds) after each return so that each new attempt is as close to a 'cold' trial as possible.

STAGE SIX

Vary the time increments – mix up shorter and longer times. Keep it random! Step just outside the doorway, don't go further away yet and during this stage, don't close the door.

- Put your dog's favourite goodies in the kitchen by or in their bed. Let them get their food/toys

- Step towards the door then return

- Step out of the door then return

- Step out of the door, pause then return

- Repeat, gradually increasing the time (randomly!) until you can step outside the door for **one minute**

- Make sure your dog is relaxed and calm at each stage. If they show any sign of stress, remain at the time level you reached for a while, then try again to build it up slowly

STAGE SEVEN

(Remember: Hang out with your dog for 20-30 seconds after each return.)

Vary the time increments – mix up shorter and longer times. Keep it random! Stay in view all the time during this phase

- Put your dog's favourite goodies in the kitchen by or in their bed. Allow them in and let them get their food/toys

- Step nonchalantly out of the door, shut it, then return after 10 seconds, build up gradually to one minute

- Repeat, gradually increasing the time you spend outside the door by several seconds at a time up to 5 minutes, then by 20-30 seconds at a time up to 10 minutes, then by a minute at a time up to **30 minutes**. Keep it random, mix shorter and longer time durations. (A good book or Kindle can help!)

- Make sure your dog is relaxed and calm at each stage. If they show any sign of stress, remain at the time level you reached for a while before moving on again

- During this phase, your dog should run out of her food in the treat ball/Kong, but still remain calm and settled without it

This phase is relatively quick for most dogs. But if your dog is having trouble, reward them for any small increment of calm behaviour to build duration.

Vary the time increments – mix up shorter and longer times. Keep it random!

STAGE EIGHT: Out of sight:

- Put your dog's favourite goodies in the kitchen by or in their bed. Let them get their food/toys

- Walk nonchalantly out of the door, close it, then go to an area entirely out of view/sound and return immediately

- Repeat, gradually increasing the time by seconds then minutes until you reach **30 minutes**

- Vary the time increments randomly as before, mixing up shorter and longer times

- Make sure your dog is relaxed and calm at each stage and that you pause long enough before each trial. If they show any sign of stress, go back a stage for a while then try again

Use the space below to plan your Random Reward Routine

Stages nine and ten: Leaving your dog alone

STAGE NINE: Front door:

ONLY start this stage once you have completed the previous stage and reached 30 minutes out of sight

Hang out with your dog for 20-30 seconds after each return.

Repeat each task and wait for your dog to be FULLY relaxed and calm before you try the next step.

- Put your dog's favourite goodies in the kitchen by or in her bed. Allow them in and let them get their food/toys
- Step nonchalantly out of the door, shut the door, pick up your keys, walk halfway to the front door then return
- Repeat, until you can walk all the way to the front door (but don't touch it) while carrying your keys
- Touch the front door (but not the handle) and return immediately
- Touch the door handle and return immediately
- Touch the handle and open the door a crack then return immediately
- Open the front door half way, close it, and return immediately
- Open the door all the way, close it and return immediately

By the end of this phase you should be able to open and close the front door 15-20 times over around 30 minutes without any reaction from your dog.

STAGE TEN: Practice, practice, practice

This final stage has two parts: a mix of daily sessions and longer sessions 3-4 times a week

Daily sessions:

Try to fit in one training session as below each day. Just leave your dog wherever they happen to be when you start – kitchen, your bed, living room – wherever.

Simply get up, don't say anything, then do one of the following (vary things):

- Go to front door and return to where you started
- Open front door, close it and return
- Go into another room, pause for between 3 and 20 seconds, and return
- Open front door, go out, come straight back in and return
- Open front door, go out, count to 5, come back in and return

When you return, just ignore your dog.

Do 10-20 brief absences in this way in each session, with only a few seconds between each trial.

Main sessions: 3-4 times each week

Move your car up the road out of sight of the house AT LEAST one hour prior to doing this training.

- Get ready to go out as you would usually do.

- Set up the camera(s) (if you have them), and put food/toys out by your dog's bed

- Don't say anything to your dog, just go out of the door.

Go to the car and sit and watch what your dog does on the camera/ phone.

Go back to the house several times (every 5-10 minutes or so), just going in and ignoring your dog initially – but pet them when they are calm and sitting. Just potter round or sit and read for between 1 and 5 minutes, then go back out again, saying nothing to your dog.

Do 5-10 returns using a random routine (see below) before going back to end the session. Review the recording when you return to make sure your dog did not become stressed.

Please note any stress signs your dog shows during these sessions – whining, barking, jumping for example, and also note how long they take to become fully relaxed again afterwards.

> *NOTE: If at any time you see your dog become stressed and upset, end the session and go back to them immediately.*

Going out and leaving your dog

Suggested Random Reward Regime with an average of around 13-15 minutes:
> 5 minutes
> 10 minutes
> 5 minutes
> 20 minutes
> 10 minutes
> 5 minutes
> 15 minutes
> 10 minutes
> 20 minutes
> 5 minutes
> 20 minutes
> 15 minutes
> 25 minutes

Continue in this random way, gradually increasing the average time away up to 30 minutes.

Once you reach 30 minutes, you should be ready to increase by an average of 10 minutes at a time up to one hour.

Once the magic hour mark is reached it will be even easier to increase the time up to three hours.

And you'll have cured the problem.

Well done!

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