



Bristol and District Branch
Registered charity number 205858

RSPCA Bristol Animal Clinic

SEPARATION ANXIETY IN DOGS

What is separation anxiety?

This condition is a distress response to separation from the 'pack', usually the dog's owner, one, or all members of the family. It is usually triggered by you leaving the house, preparing to leave, or being absent for prolonged periods.

What are the signs of separation anxiety?

Your dog may destroy your possessions, soil the house, whine or howl when you are out, or even hurt itself in an attempt to escape confinement. Dogs with separation anxiety are often clingy and attention-seeking. A change in schedule or a visit to boarding kennels may make the symptoms worse.

How can you help your dog?

- This problem can be successfully resolved by behavioural therapy known as 'desensitisation and counter-conditioning'. Your dog may be referred to a behaviourist for this process, which takes time, but is effective if done correctly.
- Temporarily it may be necessary to change your routine so that your dog is not left alone during the delicate process of reducing anxiety. This avoids a relapse.
- If your dog is only mildly affected, he may respond to simple techniques to reduce over-attachment. For example, only giving him attention when calm, ignoring him for a period before leaving, and not allowing him to sleep in your bedroom or on furniture.
- Medication, such as 'Clomicalm' may be prescribed, but this is not effective in the absence of behavioural training.

At first you may find it difficult to change the way you interact with your dog, but remember these techniques are intended to reduce his distress. With consistency, both you and your pet will have a more relaxed relationship, and a happier, easier life.