



# Dogs' Homes of Tasmania

Operated by the Tasmanian Canine Defence League.  
Locations at Hobart, Devonport, & Burnie.

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## Caring for Dogs ~ Maintaining Health & Wellbeing

### The Facts on Separation Anxiety



Find out how to help your dog cope when you have to go out.

The destruction and soiling that often occurs with Separation Anxiety is not the dog's attempt to seek revenge on his owner for leaving him alone but is actually a panic response.

What doesn't help separation anxiety is punishment. If you punish your dog when you return home, it may well increase the separation anxiety.

Separation anxiety is not the result of disobedience or lack of training. It is a panic response.

#### What is separation anxiety?

Dogs with separation anxiety become very distressed when they're left alone. They may dig frantically, bark, scratch at doors or windows in an attempt to escape and reunite with their owners. Dogs may howl and cry in an attempt to get their owner to return or even urinate and defecate indoors as a result of the distress.

Separation anxiety can occur when:

- A dog has never or rarely been left alone
- Following a long period of time where the owner and dog have been constantly together
- After a traumatic event for the dog (i.e. being in a shelter or boarding kennel)
- After a change in family's routine or structure (i.e. moving house, relationship break-up.)

#### How can I help my dog cope when I go out?

Keep arrivals and departures low-key. Don't make a fuss of your dog when you leave. When you arrive back home, ignore your dog for a few minutes before calmly patting him.

Leave your dog with an article of clothing that smells like you.

Establish a 'safety cue' – a word or action that you use **every time you leave** to reassure your dog that you'll be back. Dogs usually learn to associate certain cues with short absences by their owners.

Some examples of safety cues are playing the radio or TV or providing a certain toy (one which can't be torn to pieces) start with short absences and build up.

If your dog chews destructively as part of his separation distress, offer a chewing item as a safety cue. Hard rubber chew toys that can be stuffed with food treats or Nylabone type products are ideal.

Other solutions to separation anxiety include taking your dog to a dog day-care facility, leaving your dog with a friend or family member or taking your dog with you.

### What if the problem is really severe?

For more severe cases of separation anxiety, there is a systematic process to get your dog used to being alone.

- Begin by carrying out normal departure activities (getting keys, coat etc.) and then sit back down. Repeat this step until your dog shows no distress at these activities.
- Repeat the above and go to the door and open it then sit back down.
- Next, step outside the door (leave the door open), then return.
- Then, step outside, close the door and immediately return.
- Slowly increase the period of time you remain outside with the door closed.
- When your dog is coping with your being on the other side of the door for several seconds, introduce a verbal safety cue (i.e. I'll be back), leave and return within a minute. Your return must be low-key. Either ignore your dog or greet him quietly and calmly. If your dog shows no sign of distress, repeat the exercise gradually increasing the length of time you're gone.
- Practice as many absences as possible that last less than ten minutes. Once your dog can handle short absences, he'll usually be able to build up to handling longer intervals alone.

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WHAT DOESN'T HELP SEPARATION ANXIETY IS PUNISHMENT. IF YOU PUNISH YOUR DOG WHEN YOU RETURN HOME, IT MAY WELL INCREASE THE SEPARATION ANXIETY.

SEPARATION ANXIETY IS NOT THE RESULT OF DISOBEDIENCE OR LACK OF TRAINING.

IT IS A PANIC RESPONSE.

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#### **Devonport Dogs' Home**

**Spreyton Park Racecourse  
Devonport TAS 7310**

**Ph: (03) 6427 2178**

#### **Hobart Dogs' Home**

**101 Scotts Rd.,  
Risdon Vale TAS 7016**

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