

- If your dog struggles with this in any way, try staying in the room with your dog but DO NOT interact with them. Just sit quietly. Once they are used to the idea of being in the room with you and not interacting, you can start shutting the stair gate for a few minutes.
- Over a few days, gradually increase the time your dog is left behind the stair gate until they are relaxed enough for you to go far enough away so you are out of sight completely. You can build up to your dog being left for up to half an hour while you busy yourself elsewhere in the house.
- Once they are comfortable and confident with being left for half an hour whilst you are still in the house, you can then build up to them getting used to short periods of time alone in the house. Prepare their area as normal and follow the same routine as practiced. Get ready to leave your home and start by returning after a few minutes. Repeat the process a few times over the course of the day.
- Gradually increase the time you leave your dog alone in the house to about half an hour, over a period of days.
- Most importantly, take your time and be patient. You may need to go back a step and start from where your dog felt comfortable if they begin to show any signs of worry. Some dogs will progress more quickly than others so you will need to adapt your approach to your own dog's needs.
- Sounds, like picking up keys or putting on your coat, might trigger a worried reaction from your dog. Include this as part of your training by regularly picking up keys or putting on your coat but not actually leave the house. This will desensitise your dog to these sounds and allow your dog to get used to them without reacting to them.
- On your return home, keep greetings friendly but low key and calm, even if they have chewed something or toileted. Again, just go back a few steps and start again.
- If you need to leave your dog for several hours, make sure you have built them up to this using the above techniques. You will need to make sure they have been well exercised and have had the opportunity to toilet and for some, a small meal make help to make them feel more relaxed and sleepy.

For information on techniques or pheromone products, call and book a complimentary consultation with one of our RVN's.

Consulting Times

Hillock Lane Surgery

Monday to Friday
8.30am to 7pm

Saturday
8.30am to 1pm



Blackpool Surgery

Monday to Friday
8.30am to 6pm

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Separation Anxiety in Dogs

Rowan Veterinary Centre

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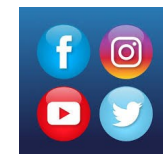
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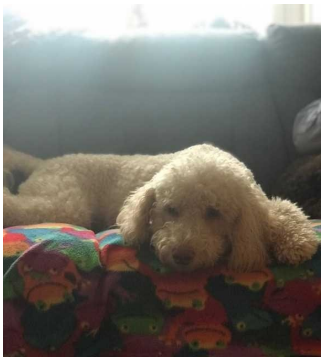
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Dogs are very social animals. They naturally live in family groups and as they have evolved over thousands of years to work and live with us, most would choose to spend the majority of their time in our company.

Although dogs should not be left for too long on their own, they can get used to being left for short periods when

young, growing up feeling relaxed and comfortable when left on their own for some part of the day. However, some dogs can suffer from “separation anxiety” which is stressful for the dog and owners alike.

What is separation anxiety?

It is simply your dog feeling stressed and anxious about being left alone. The reasons are varied but could include:

- Your dog has never been left alone in the home regularly before or separated from a particular person.
- Your dog is scared of or worried by something either inside or outside the house. This could be something that happens on a daily basis, such as the postman arriving. It could be something that happened only once, such as a thunderstorm. Dogs feel more vulnerable when they are on their own so it's easy for them to develop a specific fear, particularly if they are of a sensitive or nervous nature.
- An animal companion dies. This could be another dog who shared a close bond with the dog who is left behind but it is not uncommon for strong attachments to be made with other species such as cats.
- Your dog could just be bored!!! This can affect young, energetic dogs who struggle when left to their own devices. They may find their own entertainment, such as chewing table legs or raiding the rubbish bin.

What are the symptoms of separation anxiety?

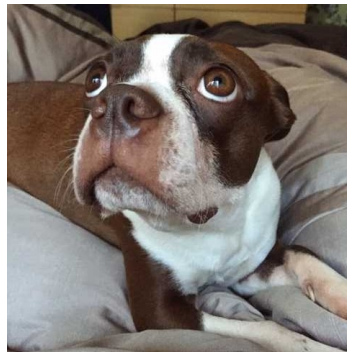
- Your dog becomes distressed as soon as you leave the house.
- The first 15 minutes are the worst with your dog becoming extremely upset. They may show all the signs of fear; an increase in heart and breathing rate, panting,

- salivating, increased activity and sometimes needing to go to the toilet. Your dog may try to follow you as you leave and may scratch at doors, chew doorframes, scratch carpets or jump up at windowsills. Your dog may also bark, whine or howl to try and persuade you to come back.
- When you return home, your dog may settle down to chew something that you have recently touched. The item will carry your scent so will be a comfort to them. They will often chew scented items into small pieces and curl up in the debris so that it forms a barrier around them, making them feel safe.
- Whilst you are home, your dog may follow you wherever you go in the house. They may begin to display anxious behaviours when they see you preparing to leave the house, i.e. panting, pacing etc.

Should I punish my dog?

The short answer is no! Here's why and why punishment just doesn't work to resolve the issue.

It's natural for an owner to be angry or disappointed if they return to find damage to their home, mess in the house or annoyed neighbours. Your dog will sense that you are upset and might display “appeasement behaviour”; their ears may go flat, their body may be lowered and their tail may go between their legs. Some may look away, their eyes narrowed as if they are cringing.



This can be misinterpreted by owners as an admission of guilt, believing that their dog knows that they have done wrong and have done these things on purpose.

This is not the case and the displayed behaviour is a response to your disappointment, anger and upset and is

their way of trying to diffuse the tension in response to feeling threatened. Some dogs will display this appeasement behaviour if they think they are about to be told off if they have been so in the past.

Any punishment won't help to stop the problem. Your dog will associate the punishment with what they are doing right at that moment in time and so your dog will not link the telling off with the actions before you came home. It is not that they cannot remember what happened, it's that they won't be able to make a connection between the punishment and something they did hours ago.

So what can I do to help my dog?

A stair gate is a fantastic tool to help your dog get used to being alone. They are not as scary as a closed door and they still allow your dog to see, smell and hear you. You can help your dog get used to a little bit of distance between you while you are still in the house.

- Place the gate on the door to the room where you have decided you will leave your dog alone in when you do leave the house.
- Put a comfortable bed and water in this room and chew items too (chewing is a calming activity for your dog).
- Consider leaving a radio on at a low level in the room to provide a little background noise and “company”. It may also muffle any other sounds that might startle or frighten your dog. Talking stations are best.
- Put an item of clothing you've worn recently in your dog's bed as this might increase your dog's sense of security during training and whilst they are left alone.
- Adaptil products can also help your dog as they release comforting pheromones which help to make dogs feel more relaxed.



Let the training begin!

As with any type of training, it's ideally best started from a young age. Even if you don't intend to leave your dog alone for a long time, there will come a time when you will need to leave your dog at home. If they're not used to it then they may become very distressed.

- Randomly during the day, put your dog behind the stair gate with a tasty chew. Close the gate behind you and go about your usual routine. Try to stay in eye and earshot of your dog, especially if they are young or new to the house. After a few minutes, open the gate (ideally whilst your dog is in a relaxed state, still engrossed in their treat), and leave it up to your dog to decide if they'd either like to stay where they are or to leave the room.