



Foster Program

Foster Dog Behavior Guide

Dealing with Separation Anxiety

Shelter dogs may experience separation anxiety when they are brought to their new foster homes, or forever homes. When a dog's environment changes sometimes this can cause them to experience stress, fear, frustration, and/or anxiety. Dogs deal with anxiety in a number of ways. Here are some tips to help your dog cope with separation anxiety.

1. Be understanding. It can be incredibly frustrating and stressful for the humans when a dog has separation anxiety because of the damage that can sometimes occur when a dog has separation anxiety. But try to remember that the dog is also feeling incredibly stressed out as well, that is why they are displaying this behavior.
2. Make sure your dog is getting plenty of exercise before you leave them. They do not need to be so tired they can't stand, but you want to give them a chance to burn off some energy before leaving them. Take them for a brisk walk. Allow them to sniff, but also try to keep up the pace. If your dog likes playing, then engage them in a high energy game with toys before taking them out for their walk.
3. Provide them with some mental stimulation before you leave, and while you are gone. After your dog has their morning walk, you can feed them out of a puzzle toy or enrichment activity. If you don't have any puzzle toys, you can scatter their food on the ground, or roll it up in a towel so they have to use their brain and nose to find all of their food. When you are gone you can provide them with a stuffed kong or a chew to keep them busy.
4. Come up with a routine for when you leave, and stick to it. Whether you leave for 10 minutes or multiple hours you will always follow this routine. For example. Wake up > potty break > enrichment breakfast > exercise session > special treat > relaxing music playing > leave. Depending on the time of day you may leave out a few steps such as an entire meal, but you would do your best to keep the routine the same. Pairing this with a special phrase or word will also help such as "see ya later" or "bye bye" so your dog learns to associate that word with you leaving, and then coming back.
5. If possible have someone come and check in on your dog if you will be gone for long periods of time. This will help your dog learn that they will not be alone for too long. Teach this person the routine so they know how to appropriately leave your dog alone.

(This all does seem a little excessive, but it is not forever. Once your dog learns that it is ok to be alone, it will become easier and easier to leave them!)

6. Make sure your dog is in a spot where they can be safe. Some dogs do well in a crate, some do well being confined to a room, and some do better having free run of the house. CACHS always recommends attempting to crate train your dog first, and using that as a way to confine the dog. This does not always work however and you may have to try other methods to confine them. Practice crating your dog when you are home so you can see how they may react to it. Observe when you are in the room with them, and then practice leaving them alone in the crate while you are still home.