



THE VETERINARY SURGERY

Yarrambat & North Warrandyte

SEPARATION ANXIETY

We breed dogs to be our close companions. Because of this the majority of dogs prefer the company of people over other dogs and as a species they are better at reading human body language than chimpanzees (and probably people!).

Unfortunately, although many of us would like to, we cannot spend all of our time with our doggy friends. Work and social commitments frequently mean our dogs need to spend time on their own, whether it is for brief periods or the entire day. Normal dogs cope fine with time alone, usually spending the hours resting or sleeping. Some dogs with anxiety issues do not cope well with being on their own - they become very distressed and may even panic.

Signs that your dog may suffer from separation anxiety include destructive behaviour, house-soiling, barking, pacing and salivating. Sometimes it is obvious that this is occurring if the dog is creating a mess or the neighbours are complaining. At other times it is not so easy to diagnose because the behaviour occurs only when you are not there. If you are worried that your dog suffers from separation anxiety, set up a video camera or webcam and record what they are doing when you are absent. You may be surprised.

Separation anxiety can be successfully managed by tackling the problem from a variety of angles. In severe cases, medication may be necessary, particularly if your dog is becoming so distressed that they are panicking.

Providing enjoyable activities for your dog while they are on their own can be useful – we call this environmental enrichment. Use toys and food to keep them occupied. You can use commercial food dispensing devices such as Kong Wobblers or Buster Cubes, make your own challenges, freeze food in ice blocks or hide and scatter food around your house and garden. Use your imagination or the internet for inspiration and provide new challenges for your dog each day.

Try to encourage more independent behaviour by changing the way you interact with your dog. Make departures and arrivals low key – it is fine to greet or say goodbye to your dog but do not make these events big occasions by becoming excited or playing. Structure interactions with your dogs by ignoring attention seeking behaviour – it is fine to pat, cuddle and play with your dog but make sure you initiate each interaction and ask your dog to perform a calm, simple behaviour first, such as a sit.



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Obtaining a second dog only occasionally helps a dog that is suffering from separation anxiety – most dogs that suffer from the condition will not be comforted by the presence of another dog. If you want to find out if another dog will help, trial it first by 'borrowing' a dog for a period – volunteer to look after a friend or family member's dog while they are on holiday.

If you are concerned that your dog is suffering from separation anxiety, we can help. Book an appointment with one of our vets and we can discuss possible management options with you.