

## SEPARATION ANXIETY

Separation is one of the main areas in which pack leadership is established. Leaders do not interact with subordinate members of the pack when they leave, nor when they first return. Thus, if we do the same, we send our dogs the message that we have the right stuff to be leaders. This is because Fido expects his leaders to come and go as they please.

On the other hand, if we make eye contact, talk to or pet Fido upon leaving or returning, the message to Fido is that we are sick or injured and that he must take care of us. As leader, the dog believes it is responsible for the survival of its pack including us. The dog sees us as its pups who continually must be in his/her care. In human terms, we are the 3-year-old whom mom or dad must take care of all the time. Just picture what it would be like if a 3-year-old child walked out the door and its mom or dad had no idea of where it went. The parent's first reaction would be: "I lost my baby!" This is what separation anxiety is about! Fido believes he has lost his baby!

The degree of separation anxiety depends on how much Fido believes he needs to care for his human pack mates. Separation anxiety can be manifested in behaviors ranging from acting anxious, whining, barking, howling, peeing or pooping, to destructive chewing. Fido may try to chew or dig his way out of the home to reach his human pups. Or, he may chew woodwork, furniture, clothing, etc. in an attempt to calm himself. As with us humans, Fido's brain releases endorphins when he chews.

The best way to end separation anxiety is by becoming the pack leader. However, you can use the following steps to help desensitize Fido to your comings and goings. Before you start an exercise, make sure everything in your place is calm.

- 1) Any time you think of it, stand up and sit down. We want Fido to think nothing of this.
- 2) Sometimes, leave the room (without closing a door) and come right back. Do this many times a day until Fido does not seem to care about it. Whoever is home can do this together, individually, or in some combination of those of you who are there.
- 3) Practice gesture leaving (explained below) with Fido in your home to show that you are okay to leave and return without him being with you. Do not interact with Fido before you do the exercise or any time during it. This means no eye contact, talking to Fido, or petting. Do not even say his name.

Practice gesture leaving daily for at least several minutes in total. Here are the steps:

- In full view of Fido, leave the room or your home and close the door. After counting to 5, go back inside and walk away from the door. After about 10 seconds, head back out for another 5 count. Repeat this exercise several times.
- Once Fido does not react to being separated for a count of 5, do a 10 count. Once Fido is comfortable with a count of 10, try a count of 20. Each time Fido becomes comfortable with a level of separation, increase the count. So, after count of 20, try a count of 30. After a count of 30, try a minute etc.
- Keep in mind that every time you go to the bathroom, your basement, your garage or elsewhere in your home for a few minutes and close the door, you are gesture leaving. These separations also help diminish Fido's sensitivity to "your being gone". By the way, it is a good idea to not let Fido into the bathroom with you. Remember not to talk to him even through the bathroom door.
- With the last repetition of gesture leaving, it is important that you again disregard Fido when you return. Let him settle down and relax for at least several minutes. Then, you can call Fido to you and give him all the love you wish. In doing so, you are reuniting like a pack leader.

Remember to always disregard Fido any time you leave him and reunite with him. This includes going to the bathroom, leaving your home, leaving Fido in the car, or even when you go to sleep. You want Fido to believe that you always have the right stuff to be the pack leader.

Besides desensitizing Fido to your comings and goings, gesture leaving is a way to send Fido a lot of leadership signals in a short span of time because you are separating and reuniting like a leader.

If you have questions, do not hesitate to call me at 860-604-0996. I welcome calls every day between 9 AM and 9 PM at no cost or obligation. I am always happy to be of service!