**Start small with separation**

If your dog is already reacting strongly to your departure, start small by going through one of the actions that signals departure—like putting on shoes—and then hang out at home. Do this repeatedly to try and remove that initial negative association.

You can then move on to training your dog to sit and stay while moving progressively farther away; train them to lie down when you’re out of sight and reward them when you come back.

“Dogs and puppies with this condition need to learn to self-soothe when separated from their guardians. Training will generally start out with low-intensity separation scenarios using gates, pens, and tethers, while the guardian remains at home, with the goal of gradually increasing the intensity over time as a dog or puppy shows that they can handle it,” Bassett adds.

**Practice low-key departures**

When you do leave, don’t make a big deal out of it. The same goes for returning home (wait until after your dog settles down and is calm to give affection). It might be tough to pretend you’re not overjoyed to see your pup, but it’s a good idea to avoid an over-the-top reunion. You want to reinforce the idea that your comings and goings aren’t a reason to ramp up energy and emotions.

**Exercise is key**

Dr. Dodman also recommends “tons of exercise,” which generates serotonin, which has a mood-stabilizing, calming effect.

Rodriguez also emphasizes the importance of  ample exercise and providing an outlet so your dog is fulfilled and can relax when they need to.

Ultimately, dogs are a lot like humans in that they are complicated and uniquely individual—so there really is no one-size-fits-all approach to separation anxiety. Treating separation anxiety also depends on the severity of the problem. Many experts admit that dealing with extreme separation anxiety can be challenging. “Real separation anxiety is a severe case behavior, and it’s a long-term process,” says Hodges, who, along with Dr. Dodman, and many other experts, recommends that for very severe cases, you consult your veterinarian for options.

**Can Separation Anxiety Be Prevented?**

While experts say that it may not always be possible to fully prevent your dog from feeling anxious when you leave the house, there are some ways to help your dog feel safe and calm when you do have to head out.

**Create boundaries while you’re home**

Much like human children, dogs thrive on structure and predictability in their day-to-day routines, so Wood advises organizing your dog’s entire day into two categories: interaction and non-interaction. “That means you choose when your dog has a walk, playtime, potty time, cuddle time, training time, or outings…and in all of those moments when you’re not deliberately interacting with your dog, they should be crated or relaxing calmly,” she says. “This keeps their minds from racing or worrying, and cultivates trust in you.”

Bassett agrees that it’s important for puppies to experience low-intensity separation from their guardians safely and early on in their lives—in fact, separation from their owner should become part of a puppy’s daily routine. “Otherwise, they may be shocked and distressed the first time they are left at home alone, which can activate these behaviors,” she says. And, of course, since dogs require a great deal of time and attention, anyone who truly doesn’t have the time to properly care for a dog probably shouldn’t get one.

It’s tempting to give non-stop affection and pets to our dogs when we’re home more than usual. And it’s adorable when your dog “demands” (with an insistent paw) that you keep petting them. But if that behavior doesn’t have limits, it can lead to bigger problems. “The best thing to do is make sure that that type of behavior from the dog isn’t met with play, positive attention or anything that the dog can perceive as rewarding,” says Blake Rodriguez, trainer and founder of [Dream Come True K9](https://www.dctk9.com/).  This means not only taking away that type of attention but also the addition of something that the dog deems as discouraging, like moving them out or off and away from the area.  Later on if the dog wants to enter your space they can do so but, in a more respectful and appropriate manner.

**Crate training creates space and safety**

To avoid encouraging feelings of anxiety in your dog in the first place, many experts tout the importance of crate training for dogs. When done properly, the crate provides a dog a safe, cozy place to relax when you’re busy or away, Wood says.

Ideally, crate training is introduced when your dog is a puppy or when they first come home with you. The crate should be used as a haven, and not a punishment. “The reason I’m going to get a crate is that I want a dog to get comfortable in a space that is away from me so that they’re not on me 24-7,” says Rodriguez. “Because when a dog only knows a life where, when you are around I am on top of you and with you, you run a very high risk of creating separation anxiety.”

A crate, however, should never become a substitute for spending time with a dog or puppy, and become a place where they’re kept because someone doesn’t have the time, energy, or commitment to properly care for them,” Woods says. “Isolation is not healthy for a dog,” she says.

**When you do leave**

When you’re away, provide some benefits— leave your dog with a safe distraction, like a treat-filled puzzle toy, play music, and make sure there’s a comfortable place to rest. When you come home, put away the toys and treats, so they’re associated with your being away.

Again, practice low-key goodbyes as a preventative measure. Don’t introduce the concept that leaving is a big deal in the first place.

**Preventing post-pandemic separation anxiety**

It’s easy to see the unusual circumstances of the COVID-19 era as a bonanza for dogs. As working from home became the norm, more people adopted dogs who then enjoyed round-the-clock companionship and more walks than even they knew what to do with.  It was a win-win for two social species looking for companionship in troubled times. But, if dogs crave routine, what happens when the routine shifts and owners are no longer around 24/7? As Dr. Dodman notes, these shifts are classic triggers for separation anxiety.

Rodriguez [told us,](https://www.thefarmersdog.com/digest/caring-for-your-dog-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/) “What is likely to happen is a lot of households creating a breeding ground for anxiety. When you have a dog who is with you (and interacting with you) 24/ 7, it might seem fine now.  But if you’re not setting up your dog where there is playtime, there’s engagement time, and then…there is also a bit of separation time, it can create problems.”

To give yourself, and your dog, the best chance of avoiding problems down the line, do what you can to maintain that separation time. That doesn’t have to mean confining your dog physically with a crate or a separate room. But it does mean, says Rodriguez, setting rules “that say, OK. I want you over here when I’m cooking or watching TV.”

Try to maintain some semblance of a normal routine when it comes to leaving your house without your dog. And when you’re home, maintain that degree of separation, with the limits set by you.

Now is a better time than ever to practice time and place, says Rodriguez. “Where there’s time to engage and allow your dog into your personal space and also to practice separation, that’s a really good thing.”

“Since the cause of separation anxiety is still not fully understood, it’s not possible to identify specific measures that will prevent it…but there are ways to maximize your dog’s alone-time success,” Clarke concludes. Consult a vet and a certified trainer as soon as you notice signs of separation anxiety in your dog. And remember that whether or not your dog suffers from separation anxiety, training, and sustaining a strong relationship should be an ongoing activity for the life of your dog.

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