

## Separation Anxiety by Robert Jay Russell, Ph.D.,

All dogs in every dog breed can exhibit separation anxiety, a true anxiety disorder similar to human anxiety disorders. In terms of potential destruction, many of the high energy breeds (e.g., terriers) or larger breeds (e.g., Labrador Retrievers, Cocker Spaniels) or mixed breeds can often cause more destruction during their anxiety attacks than can Cotons or smaller breeds.

Separation Anxiety occurs when a puppy or adult dog perceives that he is abandoned and his fear response becomes ritualized, taking on a life of its own. The virtually reflexive reaction primarily manifest in object destruction and vocalizations can be curbed, but it is best to train a new puppy or dog away from its anxiety in the first place.

In brief, everyone who acquires a puppy (of any breed) should begin training the dog to accept the family's comings and goings from the first week the dog is in their home. No exceptions.

During daytime puppy/new doghouse training, a puppy should be given a safe room with water bowl, sleeping pad (perhaps within an open dog crate which serves as its den). Having a radio playing music/talk is a good idea. From a day or two after arrival, all family members should spend time with the pup and time training the dog to accept their absence. Providing the pup with a toy/chew that it receives only when the house member departs the house does this. Absolutely no fuss should be made as the person exits or returns (your departure and return are no big deal). Every day, at random times, house members should leave the puppy and exit the house (if you are a stay-at-home, you can go outside in the summer or spring and read or walk around the block). Extend your leave of absence from a few minutes to a few hours as training progresses. When returning, no fuss should be made and the dog's unique toy should be removed for use at your next departure. After a few minutes, you can calmly greet the dog. Lessons learned: (1) people depart at random times and nothing happens; (2) people return and nothing the dog did during the departure had anything to do with bringing the person back; (3) when people leave the dog, he gets to play with a favorite toy.

Pups have a lot of energy (in short bursts), so it helps to exercise the puppy (or dog) prior to your departure. A morning constitutional walk is an excellent idea. No puppy can last the entire day without having to urinate and defecate, so if you must be gone more than a few hours, provide the puppy with a training pad (best if in a plastic pad holder and sprayed on

the edges with Bitter Apple to prevent shredding).

Prior to your acquisition of a puppy, it is important that you make sure that you feel comfortable working with your to help you raise your puppy and provide it with knowledgeable care throughout its lifetime. To paraphrase a true statement: it takes a village to raise a puppy.

Consistent training is very important to insure your puppy understands its proper familial rank (Beta to everyone else's' Alpha); that your puppy bonds equally to all family members; that your puppy is well socialized with other places and people, and; that your puppy feels secure in its new environment. Involve everyone in your household with the program and it will be a very happy learning experience that everyone will enjoy.