

Greyhounds: Separation & Anxiety Issues

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What are separation related issues?

Some dogs may suffer from separation related issues when left alone and find it hard to cope. Separation related issues can be distressing for both the dog and the owner; however with careful training and management they can be prevented or treated. There are a number of reasons why some dogs find it hard to cope when by themselves and these include:

- Frustration and/or boredom
- Phobias and fears - such as a fear of thunderstorms or fireworks
- Over-attachment to the owner (or family member), resulting in separation anxiety

Greyhounds and separation issues

In the UK, racing greyhounds are usually kennelled in pairs and have spent their lives surrounded by other greyhounds. Their lives follow a set schedule and daily kennel routine. This means that some greyhounds may find it difficult to cope with changes in their routine and adjusting to periods when their owner is absent; most greyhounds however, do adjust successfully to their new lives and homes after racing.



What are the signs of a separation related issue?

The signs of separation-related-distress can vary, and depend on the individual dog. Some of the more common signs that your dog is experiencing separation issues include:

- Destructive chewing, digging, ripping or shredding of objects when you are absent
- Barking or howling after you have left
- Soiling or urinating in the home when left alone
- Pacing, whining, panting, trembling as you prepare to leave the home



Preventing separation related distress

If your greyhound is showing signs of separation related issues, the advice in this leaflet aims to help you find a way of helping your greyhound to cope when you are absent, as well as preventing the issue from becoming worse. However this can be a complex, time consuming problem to resolve and this leaflet can only provide an overview of the condition and basic means to remedy.

Attention seeking behaviour

Often dogs that suffer with separation related issues become 'velcro' dogs; that is, they never leave your side and follow you from room to room, even to the bathroom. They may pester you for attention by pawing, barking, nudging and leaning on you; or they may always want to be in close physical contact such as lying at your feet.

This attention may appear like affection and is nice for us, however it does not help a dog become independent or feel secure and less anxious when left alone. To help prepare your dog for the times when he will be left alone, you need to increase his independence and decrease attention seeking behaviours.

Increasing your dog's independence

To help build your dog's independence and ability to cope when left alone, it is essential that you ignore all of your dog's attention seeking behaviour. This does not mean that you should ignore your dog completely and never give him attention; it means that you initiate attention with your dog only when he is calm and quiet.

It can also help if you teach your dog to lay on a mat or bed which is not right next to you, rather than lying at your feet or next to you. If your dog follows you from room to room, a baby gate across doors can prevent this, whilst ensuring that your dog can still see you.

For some dogs confinement to a crate, also known as an indoor kennel, can help with separation issues but only in cases where the dog has been trained to enjoy time alone in the crate. Many dogs will injure themselves trying to escape from a crate if they have not been trained to accept their crate as a safe place to relax. For details about training your dog to accept a crate, please see our crate training leaflet.

You may also find that using an ADAPTIL® plug-in, collar or spray may help reduce your dog's anxiety. ADAPTIL® is a synthetic copy of the appeasing pheromone that bitches secrete when they are nursing their puppies. It has a naturally calming effect and can help to reduce anxiety in dogs. To find out more about ADAPTIL®, speak to your vet or visit www.adaptil.co.uk.

Calm departures and greetings

Keeping your departures and returns home quiet and calm can help prevent separation related issues for your dog. If you make a big fuss of your dog when you leave the house and again when you come home, you are creating a big contrast to your presence in the house and to being absent. This contrast makes it harder for your dog to cope when you are not there and can lead to the dog anticipating your return and becoming over excited.

In the 10-15 minutes before you leave, it is best to keep your departure low key and to ignore the dog. This means no eye contact, petting or talking to your dog and not saying 'goodbye'. When you come home, it is also essential that your return is kept calm and that you ignore the dog for around 10-15 minutes until he is fully calm. These calm departures and returns will help your dog to cope better with your absence.

Dealing with destructive behaviour

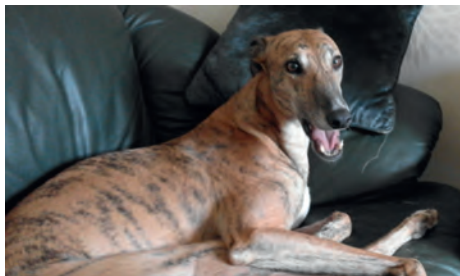
If your dog has destructive behaviour such as chewing door frames, digging up flooring, or ripping and shredding objects whilst you are absent, it may be that your dog is frustrated or bored by your absence. To help avoid this destructive behaviour it can be useful to provide your dog with something to do in your absence.

If your dog is destructive or barks in your absence, providing a chew toy such as a stuffed Kong® or feeding your dog using an activity feeder can help occupy him. You will need to find out what food your dog likes best and which will keep your dog busy trying to get it out of the stuffed chew toy. For most dogs, the smellier the food, the better! Foods like meat paste, peanut butter, cheese spread or pieces of liver sausage tend to work well. Once your dog has the hang of how to get the food out of a chew toy, you can always stuff and then freeze it, which will mean that your dog will need to work harder and for longer to get the food out.

If your dog destroys items, you can provide a number of items that your dog can safely destroy such as cardboard boxes (with any staples removed), the card board inside of kitchen roll/toilet roll, or old material.

Dealing with house soiling

If your dog soils or urinates in the house whilst you are absent, it may be that your dog is not fully housetrained or that you left your dog alone for too long with a full bladder. To avoid house soiling, make sure that you take your dog outside, and on a lead, before you leave and encourage them to toilet outside. Once they have toileted, praise them and give them a food treat. If accidents continue to happen, you will need to go back to house-training your dog. You may find that using a dog crate/indoor kennel helps your dog to avoid accidents. For further details on this, please see our crate training leaflet.



Dealing with fears and phobias

Sometimes dogs can develop fears and phobias, such as a fear of thunderstorms and loud noises, which may trigger destructive behaviour and anxiety in your dog when you are absent. If your dog has a known fear or phobia, you will need to help your dog overcome this. It is advisable that you contact a suitably qualified dog trainer or pet behaviour counsellor who will help you with a training plan to overcome your dog's fear. You can find details of how to do this in the further information and guidance section.



Dealing with separation anxiety

In cases of full-blown separation anxiety, it is likely that your dog will become increasingly anxious as you prepare to leave the house. Dogs are very good at picking up the signs that indicate you are about to leave the house. These are called departure cues and can be as simple as picking up your keys and/or bag, putting on your lipstick, or putting on your coat. These cues are what trigger your dog's anxiety and tell him you are about to leave.

To help your dog cope with your absences, you must desensitise him to your departure cues and then create positive associations with these cues. In time, this will lead your dog to associate the departure cues with something good happening, and make him less likely to be anxious when you leave. To desensitise your dog to your departure cues, you should go through the motions of leaving the house several times a day, without actually leaving.

Punishment - why you should not punish your dog

Upon your return home, if you find that your dog has been destructive, soiled or urinated in the house it is imperative that you do not punish your dog by shouting or physical means; your dog will not know what he has done wrong. Contrary to popular belief, rubbing your dog's nose in his faeces or urine, will not teach him that he has done wrong; it will only serve to make him afraid of you.

Dogs cannot make the association between events that are separated by a few minutes, so they are unable to make the connection between unwanted behaviour in your absence and your anger upon your return. Your return home is very significant to your dog and it only takes a few occasions of physical or verbal punishment to make your dog more anxious about your return. This can then lead to a fearful dog and the development of other behaviour problems.

What to do if your dog's anxiety is not improving

If your dog is showing signs of separation issues that are not improving, it is advisable to seek further help from your vet. Your local veterinary practice may recommend medication to help your greyhound cope, or a consultation with a clinical behaviourist. A clinical behaviourist works on referral and will help you with a practical treatment plan that suits both you and your greyhound's circumstances.



Some dogs suffer from separation issues and are unhappy when left alone. This leaflet provides valuable hints and training tips to give them confidence while alone.



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The information and detail set out within this leaflet has been prepared solely as general guidance on the matters which are dealt with and is not intended to replace the need for you to take formal advice on these matters.

Although within that context every effort has been made by the Greyhound Trust to ensure that the detail set out in this booklet is accurate, the Trust does not accept any liability for the contents of this leaflet or the consequences of any actions taken on the basis of the information provided. Any person taking on the responsibilities of ownership of a greyhound is strongly advised to seek formal advice on their behaviour and their behavioural tendencies.