Best Denver Dog Training – voted 2 years in a row

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**In-Home Services:** Animal Communication, Dog Behavior, Reiki

**Separation Anxiety Protocol**

(also see handouts: Phobias, Separation Anxiety – Is There Hope?, Sensory Management of Canine Anxiety)

**Differentiate from Generalized Anxiety**

Dogs with separation anxiety tend to have particular behaviors that differ from generalized anxiety, including:

Destruction near exits in order to reach their person

Onset of behaviors including prolonged vocalization within 20 minutes of departure

Incontinence of bladder and/or bowel

Injury to self

Extreme drooling

Abstaining from food and water

**General Goals for Treatment**

It’s safe to be alone.

It can be enjoyable to be alone.

My people will return.

**Individualized Goals for Specific Dog**

By looking at your dog as an individual, you can design a specific treatment plan that works in your home.

**Current Undesirable Behaviors**

List these behaviors in order to be clear about what needs to change.

Example: The dog goes crazy at the door during your departure.

**Proposed Desirable Replacement Behaviors**

For each undesirable behavior listed, indicate a desirable one, preferably that prevents the dog from engaging in the undesirable one.

Example: Instead of going crazy at the door, the dog has been trained reliably to go to his mat. This training would occur not during the departure but at stress-free, low distraction moments.

**Management**

Successful behavior change usually includes management of the undesirable behavior. Ideally, the dog never performs that behavior again.

**Human Present**

A 24/7 presence for at least the initial stage is generally crucial to long term success. This tactic aids the dog in believing he will not be abandoned and that there is nothing to fear when alone.

It also provides time to practice exercises.

Friends and relatives as well as dog walkers or board and train specific to SA can help fill the gaps of time. Forming separation anxiety partnerships to watch each other’s dogs can be very beneficial. Dog daycare situations may work for some dogs.

**Human Not Present**

The challenge is that most people are not available 24/7 even with help.

Do not crate as this type of dog will hurt themselves to escape and try to find you.

Try to place the dog in a safe area where any destruction that occurs is minimal.

Try calming aids such as Nutri-Calm, Rescue Remedy, Thundershirt, Dog Appeasing Pheromone spray for bedding, Through A Dog’s Ear CD, lavender oil in a diffuser – *see Sensory Management of Canine Anxiety handout.*

**Training to Change Behavior**

Do not do training exercise near the time when you will actually depart.

*Courage building exercises* involve the owner moving away from the dog in small enough distances that the dog remains in place and receives a treat for the courage to separate, albeit one tiny step. As the dog becomes more comfortable, this may involve going to the door, going out the door, taking out the trash or getting the mail, starting the car or driving around the block. These are done VERY SLOWLY and in VERY SMALL increments so that the dog learns to be brave and relaxed and is reinforced for it.

*Positive* *association* *exercises* pair the departure cues with rewards. Shaking your keys is paired with a treat. Putting on your work shoes is paired with a bully stick. Donning your coat is paired with a peanut butter Kong.

*Habituation* *exercises* help the dog see the departure cues as irrelevant, therefore they cease to trigger anxiety. Wear your purse to do laundry. Keep your keys in your hand while eating. Don coat for TV watching.

*Crate* *training* needs to be slow, without pressure and entirely predictable. No surprises like closing the door before they are ready. Keep the door open and pair any interest in the crate with rewards. Crates can be a safety asset in emergency or medical situations or in simply moving residences.

*Clicker* *training* can reinforce the moments of bravery and relaxed separation. Click and treat your dog for moving away from you, for looking away, for being calm, etc.

**Ongoing Assessment**

Optimally, the dog must remain symptom free when being treated. As you try a calming aid or exercise, assess your dog’s response. Only do those things which relax your dog. Only work as far and as long as your dog is comfortable.

Example: Take one step away from your dog. If he remains where he is, quickly say yes and give him a treat, rewarding him for being brave. If he moves to follow you, you have moved too far. Yes, the movement might need to be an inch in the beginning.

**Transitions and Regressions**

Any change, such as moving residences or a foster getting adopted, will most likely trigger a regression. It’s best to control each transition in phases.

Example: Adopter visits the dog with foster, takes the dog on a short walk with foster, visits with the dog in adopter’s home for an hour with foster. Then - visits – walks – adopter’s home – occur without foster. Time in the new home is incrementally increased. Simultaneously, adopter begins exercises with an eye to assessment.

**Finally: the dog is who he or she is.**

Dogs can be completely healed from separation anxiety. However, they may still be anxious in general or have other unrelated behavior problems.