

Sarah Whitehead's

3-step

Separation problem prevention plan



Prevent separation problems in 3 steps

Separation anxiety is normal! But we need to prevent it

Our dogs love being with us – and we love being with them - especially at times like these. We rely on each other.

However, we need to be mindful that dogs can become over-dependent on our presence, and that when things go back to normal, they are going to have to cope with being left home alone for short periods once again.

If your dog is very attached to you already, then you need to think about how you can prevent him from going 'cold-turkey' when you go back to work or your normal routine.

Without this, we can expect that our dogs will suffer from separation problems.

And this can mean he engages in destructive behaviour, a breakdown of house training, barking and howling, escape behaviours or even self-harm.

It's serious stuff - and potentially very distressing for your dog.

Prevention is always better than cure, so help your dog to cope by following this plan from the outset:

If you already have a problem with your dog's behaviour



1. Prevent 'shadowing'!

If your dog follows you everywhere you go and can't let you out of his sight, or has to be touching you all the time, he's well on the way to forming a 'contact addiction' that's going to create problems later.

Create space between you throughout the day by building it into your routine:

- Shut the door when you go to the bathroom! (With your dog on the outside of the door!!)
- Make sure your dog has a bed of his own. Yes, he or she can still sleep with you and cuddle up at other times, but encouraging him to use his own bed for spells during the day and preferably at night as well - will help to prevent 'contact addiction'.

2. Vary the type of interactions you have with your dog, & who he interacts with, if possible

- Not all your interactions with your dog should be close cuddling or lying on the sofa next to each other!

Do some fun training, practise some scent work, or play a canine 'mind game'. There are lots of good 'how-to's online - and you can both learn a new skill while also practicing a little gentle 'social distancing' at the same time!

- Ideally, encourage your dog to share loyalties with other people who live in the same house.

This is especially important if you have a very close relationship with your dog. Other people in the same household should sometimes feed your dog, walk him, play with him and spend time with him - not just you.

He or she should be able to stay focused and calm when with the other person, not be constantly looking for you.

3. Create a 'chew toy addiction'

- Ideally, your dog should be able to happily lie down and chew his toy without worrying about where you are or what you are doing. If he can't, then you are storing up problems for later on.



To get your dog hooked on a chew toy:

- Stuff a Kong full of goodies for your dog to work on – use really tasty food. (Recipes galore online! Search "How to stuff a Kong"!)
- Give your dog the Kong while you are present in the same room.
- Allow your dog to enjoy chewing the toy for limited random amounts of time – between 2 and 10 minutes, ideally in his bed or resting area. When you are ready to take the toy away, swap it for a tasty treat so that he doesn't think you are a 'toy snatcher' and put it away out of his sight and reach.
- Your dog should stay where he is with the Kong, and ***you should ignore him completely while he has it.*** He should be deeply involved in it and not notice where you are!
- After about a week of forming this delicious addiction, you need to give your dog a signal that it's chew time, just before he is given the Kong.

This could be a cue word, such as, "Kong time!," or a visual signal, such as a post-it note up on the wall.

You give the signal, he gets the toy on his bed, and chews it, while you move around the house or are in a separate room. Voila! You are both happy under the same roof, even if you can't see each other.

- Still limit the time that he can have the Kong for - so it remains a treat, and never just leave it lying around.