

Destructive Fido – Pets with Separation Anxiety

About 14% of pets suffer from a condition called separation anxiety. This is a distress response that dogs and cats experience when separated from people they are most attached to, usually their owners. This distress results in vocalization, pacing, urination, defecation, drooling, excessive panting and destruction of the environment. Underlying reasons for this can include fear, anxiety, over attachment to the owners and lack of stimulation or interaction.

It is important to remember that pets are not acting spiteful or out of revenge, they are acting out because they are distressed. Punishment is not a way to treat separation anxiety, and often times it can make the situation worse. A pet's response to therapy can be slow and may take multiple months. Setbacks may occur if the owner is home and then travels again, or if their work schedule changes. Using a crate to restrain the animal during an absence can often make the pet even more anxious.

Training

Training is key to overcoming this disorder. Most pet owners will increase their success, if they work with their veterinarian and a pet trainer that are experienced in separation anxiety. Training activities will include teaching the dog to be more independent, disassociating certain cues (garage door, keys) with leaving, using counter conditioning exercises, and planning departures and absences. During the training process, it is important to not leave your pet home alone. If family members cannot be with the pet, a pet daycare is a good alternative. Leaving your pet before the training is complete can be a setback, and unwanted behaviors will return.

Calming Products

Pheromone sprays have been proven to help decrease pet anxiety. The product for dogs comes in a spray, diffuser or collar and is called Adaptil. The cat product comes in a spray and diffuser and is called Feliway. Some pets respond to a tight jacket called the Thundershirt as well.

Medications

Anti anxiety medications can be helpful along with an aggressive training schedule under the direction and care of your veterinarian. It is best to discuss medication options with your veterinarian to decide what is best for your pet. Some medications are meant to be administered on an everyday basis, while other can be given about an hour prior to the event causing anxiety. It is best to work with your veterinarian to find what is best for your pet.