



## **PLANNING AHEAD: AVOIDING SEPARATION ANXIETY AFTER LOCKDOWN**

We are currently in a period of time when many of our dogs have continuous access to human company.

Dogs are social animals and form strong attachments to their owners, and without practice at being alone, this can develop into over-dependence and anxiety when parted from the owner. One of the risk factors for separation anxiety is spending a lot of time with an owner who then returns to work.

Our dogs will need to learn to cope without us so that when the time comes, we are able to resume normal routines. This may be a particularly significant issue for the current generation of puppies, which are growing up with their owners always at home.



### **HELPING PUPPIES AND OLDER DOGS LEARN TO COPE ALONE:**

- ♥ Establish a safe place for your dog, perhaps a crate or their bed, and make this really interesting and positive for them using chews, toys and perhaps a sprinkling of food.
- ♥ Introduce short periods of separation during the day, leaving the dog in their safe place with something to occupy them while you are gone from the room for a few seconds.
- ♥ Gradually increase the duration, building up to intervals that enable you to leave them while you make tea or have a shower.
- ♥ Always work at a level they can tolerate – don't leave puppies alone to "cry it out" because the last thing you want is for the puppy to associate being alone with stress.
- ♥ If they are struggling to cope, go back to a shorter time apart and practise at that level a bit more, then gradually build up the time again.



The above exercise is something all dog owners should practise regularly while we are at home with our dogs, so that our dogs are prepared for the time when we return to our work routines and go out without them.

If your dog already suffers with separation anxiety, displaying signs of distress when alone (such as destructive behaviour, house soiling and/or barking / crying), the above advice will probably not be enough to resolve the problem – please contact me so I can help you to address this.

If you are not currently leaving the house for work, lockdown is probably suiting your dog very well, but of course the problem will still be there when things return to normal. Now is the ideal time to work on this issue.

Although in-person training sessions and home visits are not currently possible, I'm offering live online consultations via various platforms to help with behavioural issues in dogs and cats, and shorter training sessions are also available. To find out more please email [lucy@petbehaviourhelp.co.uk](mailto:lucy@petbehaviourhelp.co.uk) or visit my [website](#).

*Lucy Bingley CCAB is a local Certificated Clinical Animal Behaviourist working on veterinary referral to help dogs and cats with behavioural disorders.*