

# The *ultimate* SA training guide



If you have come this far you probably feel like you have tried everything and that **nothing** works.

This guide will help you to work out exactly **why** your previous efforts have failed, and importantly, what the **right** and **only** method to use is.

WE WILL COVER THE 5 MOST COMMON MYTHS WHEN IT COMES TO SEPARATION ANXIETY TRAINING



LET'S GO!



# First things first..



## What is separation anxiety?

it is a crippling fear of you leaving or of being alone.

The behaviours your dog displays when alone are **unconscious** and due to being in a state of panic.

Many training methods circulating online focus on suppressing these behaviours. However this just serves us and our desires. In order to truly 'fix' the problem we need to change the underlying emotion around being alone - fear.

Now the important thing is that you don't beat yourself up if you have tried any of the methods below. You inevitably have. It isn't because you're a bad dog parent. In fact it's because you were trying your best on the information you had.

The internet armchair experts are full of well meaning advice on separation anxiety and how to work on it. It is really difficult to know what the right thing to do actually is.

But I can promise you that you can trust me! I only work with separation anxiety cases and more importantly, I live with one! so have been through the process start to finish.



1



## Myth #1

*"You need to crate your dog when you leave them"*



I understand why people do use crates if their dog is destructive or toilets when alone. But again, confining them is just there to serve us, and not your dog.

Confining creates WAY more anxiety. Imagine being locked in a cage with a spider if you have arachnophobia... now imagine being in a house with a spider. Which feels less scary?

Crating a separation anxiety dog can cause severe psychological damage and trauma. It is another method used to suppress behaviours - they aim to teach a dog that they have no option but to give up.

Crates can be very useful if used as safe spaces for puppies during housetraining. And some adult separation anxiety dogs are fine in a crate at night. But if used during alone time they become a prison cell.



## Myth #2

*"Leave them to cry it out until they give up"*

2



Perhaps the most commonly perpetuated advice, and the most damaging too.

I'm sure someone will have told you to stop giving your dog 'attention' when they vocalise because they will then do it forever more.

Crying when alone isn't for 'attention' in a demanding or spoilt sense. It is because of an intense fear that they are alone. They are calling to you to help them, to save them. We have bred dogs for thousands and thousands of years to want to be with us. And then we wonder why they can't cope when they are without us.

Research studies have shown that leaving dogs to cry until they stop causes neurological damage and actually can be a CAUSE of separation anxiety.

Go and see your dog as soon as they vocalise when alone whether day or night.

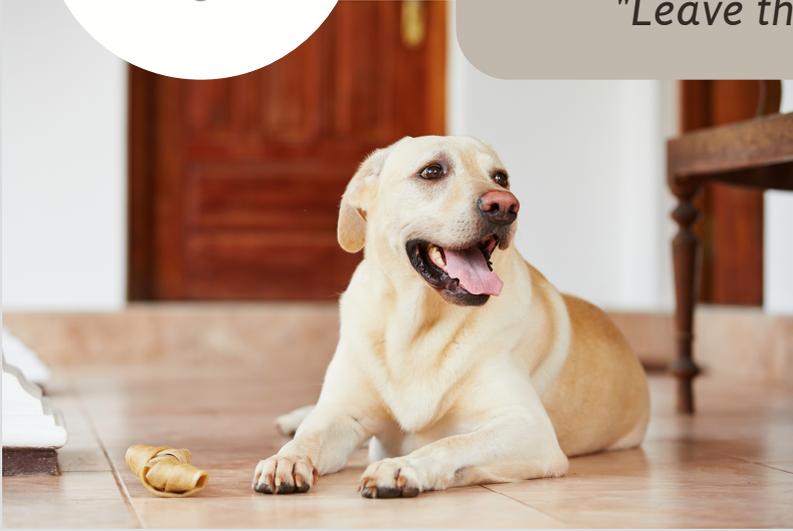


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## Myth #3

*"Leave them with some food and then go"*



Using food really complicates separation anxiety training for a few reasons.

1

The majority of dogs with separation anxiety won't eat when alone. You will know from times when you have been fearful that eating is just the last thing on your mind.

2

Giving them some enrichment before you leave can actually start to ruin something that used to be a pleasant experience for them. You might notice that when you go to the cupboard where the chews are kept that they begin looking worried.

3

Food can give us a really skewed picture of how a dog is actually coping when alone. If your dog does eat when you leave them it doesn't necessarily mean they are happy, they could still be really panicking. So it is really difficult to judge how long they can actually cope for when alone.



## Myth #4

"Pick up your keys and put your shoes on and off all day long"

4



The idea with this theory is that we 'desensitise' our dog to the thing that scares them.

So if your dog starts panicking when you pick your keys up or go to put your shoes on this is where you need to start.

However... desensitisation requires strategic planning.



It must be done very gradually at a level that does not cause anxiety. And unfortunately, by constantly putting on your shoes and picking up your keys you cause constant anxiety.

Because the fact is, it is not the coat or keys that they are scared of, it's the thing that they signal that they are scared of - you leaving!

Therefore the desensitisation work needs to be *done* on you leaving. Later on down the line these triggers are not likely to bother them anywhere near as much and they can be added back in to your training plan then.



1



## Myth #5

*"You have to ignore your dog before you leave and when you come home"*



This comes from the de-bunked theory that you can reinforce emotions. Put simply, it means that people think that by giving a dog attention when they are worried you are telling them that they are right to be worried.

The fact is that you can't reinforce emotions, you can only reinforce behaviours. So if your dog is jumping up because they are worried and you give them attention you are reinforcing the jumping up behaviour, not the worrying!

Ignoring dogs before you leave and when you return has actually been shown to create more anxiety around absences. Imagine how much you would overthink if someone started ignoring you for no reason!

Make your greetings neutral and natural, nothing OTT as this creates more 'arousal' and excitement. But a little stroke and 'good dog' is absolutely fine!

# So what do you do then?..



## Gradual exposure training

We need to work out duration of alone time your dog can actually cope with and then very gradually, in tiny increments build up the time from there.

We also need to stop leaving your dog for longer than they can cope with throughout the training. I know this can seem overwhelming, but for this training to work we can't allow your dog to panic when alone again or the vicious circle of being scared of alone time goes round and round.

Separation anxiety has a stigma attached to it unfortunately, but the fact is, it is possible to reach your dream durations using gradual exposure therapy.

The process is long, there is no denying that. But slow and steady wins the race every time.

*If you would like to join my community of others going through exactly the same thing, check out my online learning platform '3 Steps to Freedom' where you will get access to daily training plans for your dog, and 4 weeks of separation anxiety training modules.*

*Or if you would prefer 121 personalised help check out my Platinum programme.*

[www.rachaelclairedogbehaviour.co.uk/separation-anxiety](http://www.rachaelclairedogbehaviour.co.uk/separation-anxiety)

