

— 7 Common Causes Of —

# Separation Anxiety



Stephanie L. Brown

# 7 Common Causes of Separation Anxiety

## OH no, what have you done?

We all have seen the little dog that cries or whines when Mom steps out of the room. Not to mention the big dog that tears up the trash or pillows when Dad has gone to work. Why? Why does the dog do that? Some people like to accuse the owner of spoiling their dog. Maybe true, but how many other spoiled good dogs have we met and they don't have these issues?

Separation anxiety is not a new challenge for pet parents but it sure does appear more prevalent. It is a challenge that feels consuming, or we feel at a loss because we have tried so many things and heard many different approaches from experts. It is a challenge that can bring utter exhaustion to the owner not to mention very costly to the pocketbook. Unfortunately, lots of dogs find their way to a shelter because of separation anxiety. How many times as the owner of one of these dogs you find yourself hesitant to go home for fear of what you will find? Or you hurry home because you know having been gone for x amount of hours Fido has found some trouble to get into. How many times have you asked your dog: What are you thinking? Why are you whining? What possessed you to tear up the couch? Really, do I have to clean the carpets again? Do you not feel enough love? Or when you have company over, you close all the drapes to the windows or shrug your shoulders and say "The dog!" I just can't stop him from digging up the roses."

As an animal communicator, I represent the animal and its perspective. Potential clients call me with concerns about Fido, he is urinating or defecating when they go to work. Or the pet parent talks about how their dog whines and whines and whines until it is picked up. I hear from owners that when they go out the door and the dog starts whining and pacing until they come back in the door. Not to mention the dog that has chewed up 2 couches and the owner lost count of how many trash cans. This can truly be a costly challenge.

Here are a few examples of how separation anxiety can show its ugly face:

1. **Whining, Barking Howling**
2. **Chewing, Digging or Destruction**
3. **Pacing**
4. **Running away, escaping**
5. **Urinating or defecating**

This dis-ease (yes, I spelled that incorrectly. I want to bring it to the reader's attention that this is a mental condition meaning ill at ease) can occur in any breed, it is a state of mental anguish which the dog is in and desperately needs the help of the owners to get out of. It can appear in mild forms to an extreme. Without question, this dis-ease is heartbreaking and yet it is so satisfying to know that you have the power to help your dog and change their feelings and behavior. So that brings us to our next question, how does an owner help their dog when they have already tried everything they know how to do, everything they can think of, and even sought help from the internet or an expert or two? What are the causes of this mental challenge?

- **Medical Challenge (hearing, sight loss, urinary tract infections)**
- **Supporting bad habits**
- **Too little/too much responsibility**
- **Change in household**
- **Overwhelmed with space**
- **Lack of Confidence**
- **Boredom**

Let's take these causes one by one, expand upon it and provide greater understanding.

### Medical:

Definitely have your dog completely examined by your veterinarian first. Some medical conditions that can lead to separation anxiety are hearing loss, compromised vision, bladder infections, incontinence, and occasionally side effects of medication already prescribed by your veterinarian. Your veterinarian is the one to medically evaluate your dog and prescribe medication if necessary. Having a good relationship with your veterinarian helps too. Be honest with them, find one that has a similar life philosophy to yours.

### Supporting Bad Habits:

Owners love their dogs and they have absolutely no intention of supporting bad habits. BUT when Fido starts to whine, it is just too easy to reach down and pick up the little bundle of joy with the intent of "helping" ease their anxiety, worry, concern, fear, or insecurity. So what does this do for the dog?

Let's go back in time to when dogs aka wolves were smart enough to hang around the people for little tidbits of food. In one generation not much change can occur but when a mom teaches her puppies that people leave food on the ground then those puppies grow up and those moms teach to their puppies, and people not only leave food on the ground, we can trust that one human. Then that one trusted human becomes a trusted village and then puppies are allowed to interact with humans and develop their own bonds of relationship. Well, you can see it does not take very many generations to "domesticate" volunteers. Now let's fast forward hundreds of years and thousands of generations to a huge variety of breeds with their individual purposes. Just as a quick example: some breeds have the purpose of keeping the queen's hands warm and other breeds were to hunt lions. Human desire and intent are why we have so much variety but also this shows our desire as humans to bond with "man's best friend". Dogs are loyal, some to a fault; loving, faithful, protective, helpful, and priceless partners. I don't believe it takes much of a leap to understand that as dogs were developing their relationship with us, we were developing our relationship with them. So it is easy for me to see where we humans have used dogs as a replacement or surrogate for relationships in our lives. They understand us, they love us, they "worship" us no matter what mood we are in they are right beside us with love and devotion in their heart. Is it any wonder why we treat them like children or put them ahead of some of our human relationships; this is where we humans make a terrible assumption! That assumption is dogs share the same social structures and societal needs. This could not be farther from the truth. Dogs are pack animals and like their "family" but that family has clear-cut structure and roles. As humans, we like to think we can all get along. Well, tell that to your two-year-old when they are on the floor pounding their fists and screaming at the top of their lungs. Whether we like it or not we have unwritten rules in society and dogs have unwritten rules too. When we as humans don't know the dog rules or we assume the dog rules are the same as ours we create big challenges for ourselves and our dogs. By us picking up our dog when they are whining, we are supporting that bad behavior through physical contact and telling the dog we want him to continue the behavior. When we invite our dogs to sleep with us in bed we have just undermined our own authority in the house and more importantly in our pack. Now this does not mean the dog cannot sleep with us. It is simply something to be conscious of.

Dogs base their confidence on knowing who is in charge and what their role in the pack is. Philosophically we justify the dog is so much a part of our life that they don't need little things like structure. This is a terrible disservice to our dogs and ourselves. Dogs definitely want to please and we can use that to our advantage when training.



### **Too much/too little responsibility:**

Dogs truly want to help us and that means they want to have a job in our life. If we don't understand this and we don't provide guidance for them; they will find a job for themselves.

Let's think about our little bundle of joy: FIDO. Mom has picked him up and carried him around the house for how many hours in the day. In fact, now it is in vogue to have a cute, adorable biting accessory when we go out. We see the Hollywood stars and their lovely little white puff inside the designer bag hanging on their shoulder. This is wonderful, the dog gets to accompany the owner just about everywhere. I love it! And it has expanded the dog clothing and jewelry options (leads, leashes, harnesses, and collars). Definitely love that, so much fun! But it holds a darker side, unfortunately. That darker side is FIDO may have decided at some point, his job is to protect mom and mom has just left the house without him. What is FIDO going to do? In his mind, Mom needs him and the outside world is too scary for her to be alone. This is just one possibility.

What about the big dog who is active and loves his kids? Your son can't wait to go outside in the yard with BUBA so they can play. They are the best of friends and BUBA is perfectly happy when the two are outside in the afternoon playing ball. Now your son is a bit older and starts school, BUBA is in the yard and he doesn't have a job until your son comes home from school. What is BUBA going to do? BUBA goes to the end of the fence, all is good so he runs back to the house. Nothing new there, back to the end of the fence he goes again. He may wear out the grass at this pace and will because this occurs day after day after day. BUBA is looking for a job something important like playing ball with your son.

### **Change in household:**

We live our lives and change is an everyday occurrence, but having said that. Remember the stress you underwent the last time you changed jobs. When we move, go into a new relationship, get married, have a baby, host an exchange student, or any of the seemingly endless life changes, our animals are affected too.

Our dogs look to us for their stability. When we are in the middle of change the structure we provide for them is the foundation of their stability. What do I mean by structure? The structure is routine. Do we walk our dogs twice daily? Do we feed them at a certain time every day? Do we have a time we leave the house daily to go to work? If we as the pet parent demonstrate instability where we once had stability our dog may find that mentally challenging and act out to tell us they are insecure, fearful, and unhappy.

### **Too much space:**

As humans we love our space. When I travel to Europe my friends there like to remind me of how large we like things here in America. Americans spread out; they like big cars, big houses and they even have houses on wheels. I had never thought of it that way before, but, it is true. I have traveled enough to observe big cities, older cities have smaller spaces, small towns, new communities have bigger spaces. I love the fact that we have the luxury of space and it is very logical for me to understand why people in general make the assumption that if bigger and spread out is good for us then it is a good thing for our dogs. This makes sense until we are made aware of the dog's perspective.

Dogs are denning animals. They want to be able to control their space for safety and security reasons. Therefore, when we leave them in a big room or big house by themselves they can feel overwhelmed. Please remember the dog wants to help us and do their part in their pack. This is where a dog will take it upon itself to take on a job, for example: protecting and maintaining security in the home. When their space is so large they have to go from door to door or room to room they will drop into an anxious state. That is when undesired behaviors like tearing up pillows or defecating on the floors start.

## Lack of Confidence:

As pet parents, it is our responsibility to gently challenge our dogs with a wide range of circumstances in order for them to develop the self-confidence that encourages security and happiness. We are responsible to maintain a safe environment, but we are also responsible to encourage our dog to explore, be curious, develop, and we can encourage an attitude of adventure or fear. If little FiFi grows up in a home where she hardly ever sees another person, or she is never exposed to a person in a wheelchair how does she know how to respond to the wheelchair? And if FiFi is not exposed to new smells, surroundings, people, sights, and touches in a safe way that mom or dad controls poor FiFi is left to figure things out on her own. She may choose to bite because she is afraid of a balloon.

## Boredom:

We all know there are smart dogs, but are you the reader willing to consider all dogs think? Just like humans, some dogs solve problems and some are happy just to lie in the sun napping. If we humans choose a dog that is predisposed to solve the world's problems or we underestimate the brain power of our dogs they will find something to do. That doing might just be tearing up the couch or eating the base molding.

It is very important as pet parents to provide our pets with food, shelter, and proper amounts of exercise and not just physical exercise. They need mental and emotional exercise too. Give them controlled safe exposure to lots of new things and normal life challenges will come up. Those challenges will lead to self-confidence-building opportunities. Remember every little choice we make takes us to the end result, is the end result something you planned for or is it something you want to invest in changing?

## What do we do now?

### Identify your pet's concerns:

What category does your dog fit into? Remember; your dog may not have the same perspective you do and you may not recognize your dog's concerns as legitimate. If your dog has taken on the responsibility of protection and you walk out of the house for the day where does their head go? WORRY. You may not understand because in your mind you are perfectly capable of protecting yourself away from home.

This is just one example. Seeking a professional opinion is always advantageous. Whose opinion do you seek? The veterinarian, the behaviorist, the trainer, or the animal communicator, which one is best for you and your dog? Each one of these advisors has valid information to provide and they will do their best from their individual perspective.

## Who is Stephanie:



**Dr. Stephanie Brown** has spent over 40 years in professional service to animals. She started speaking with animals as a child which led her to work as a licensed veterinary technician for over 25 years, managing veterinary practices, and on to complete her Doctorate in Metaphysics. As a student of interspecies communication, she explored and developed her skills in obedience, agility, carting, weight pulls, and confirmation.

Her SOUL to SOUL communication practice has been focused on bridging the gap between the spiritual world and the physical world since 1995. In her practice, she supports Pet Parents in need of understanding their pet's perspectives on medical and behavioral concerns. Whether the pet is deceased or living, Stephanie provides a unique perspective for Pet Parents by utilizing her abilities in animal communication, veterinary medicine, training, showing, competing, and education. She specializes as a pet medical doula and separation anxiety consultant; bringing understanding, calm, security, and hope to move forward for both Pet Parents and Pets.

**Contact:**

**Stephanie** is currently accepting applicants for her Separation Anxiety Relief Program. If you are interested in bringing harmony to your pet and your household contact her at: [stephaniebrown.com](http://stephaniebrown.com), email: [info@stephaniebrown.com](mailto:info@stephaniebrown.com) or [310-318-PETS](tel:310-318-PETS)

