

# Avoiding Separation Anxiety: Prepare for “back to normal”

Your dog has become used to having you around 24/7 which is great for cuddling but unfortunately this can lead to separation anxiety when it's time for you to head back to work. Separation anxiety is a panic that can be brought on by sudden or abrupt change. Common separation anxiety behaviors include vocalizing, digging/scratching at exit, excessive drooling, destruction, self-mutilation, urination/defecation and/or pacing. By implementing strategies now, you can make the transition back to “normal” easier for both your dog and you.

1. Establish your routine
  - a. What will life be like in your new normal? Start to create that routine NOW!
    - i. Things to consider: waking up, bathroom breaks, feeding schedule, playtime, daily exercise/walks, training, bedtime
2. Leave the house without your dog
  - a. 3-5 times per day go through the steps of leaving just as you will when you go back to “normal”
    - i. Things to consider: putting on your shoes, grabbing your purse or briefcase, setting house alarm/locking the door, opening/closing garage or elevator doors, turning on car, etc.
    - ii. If your dog seems anxious with any of these items, practice that item but without actually going anywhere
    - iii. If you are just beginning, only leave for a few minutes at a time. Gradually increase the duration as long as you are not seeing signs of anxiety
  - b. Create positive association of you leaving by offering a frozen Kong or long-lasting chew treat when you depart
    - i. Give it to your dog in their crate or designated bed
  - c. Play music or audio books while you are gone
    - i. Sound Therapy: Solfeggio Frequency 417 Hz has been shown to promote calm (e.g.: <https://youtu.be/6SThiNGygl>). Classical music is also recommended.
  - d. Make your departure and arrival neutral
    - i. When returning, ignore your dog for a minute and then greet them without fanfare. Be boring!
3. Maximize the time you do have with your dog
  - a. Engage in mentally stimulating exercises such as obedience or trick training to help decrease their overall energy
  - b. Encourage independent play with puzzle toys or chew toys
4. If you see signs of separation anxiety, please enlist the help of a professional trainer. It is treatable!

**Thank you for making a difference!**