

BARK U Training Guide: How to Prevent Separation Anxiety

What Is Separation Anxiety?



Separation anxiety is a panic disorder that occurs when a dog becomes stressed from being separated from their people. Dogs are naturally social creatures, and many bond closely with their humans. Without proper preparation, some dogs may struggle to be alone, leading to problematic behaviors.

Common Signs of Separation Anxiety:

- Barking or vocalizing
- Destructive chewing or digging
- Pacing or restlessness
- Potty accidents, even in house-trained dogs

Preventing separation anxiety early ensures your dog develops confidence and independence, making them comfortable both with you and on their own.

Tips for Preventing Separation Anxiety

- 1. Teach Your Puppy Alone Time Is Normal**
 - Make alone time a regular part of your puppy's day.
 - Crate your puppy while you work from home, shower, or run errands to help them adjust to periods of being alone.
 - Create a routine where alone time feels like a natural and expected part of daily life.
- 2. Make Leaving a Positive Experience**
 - Before leaving, give your puppy something yummy and engaging in their crate (e.g., a stuffed Kong or a chew).
 - This creates a positive association with your departure and makes leaving an enjoyable part of their day.
- 3. Keep Exits and Entrances Low-Key**
 - Avoid making leaving or returning home a big, dramatic event.



- Exuberant greetings can increase your dog's anxiety about your absence. Keep your comings and goings calm and neutral.
- 4. Burn Energy Before Crating**
 - Exercise your puppy before leaving them alone. A physically tired dog is more likely to rest and relax in your absence.
 - 5. Provide a Calming Environment**
 - Play soft, soothing music or use a white noise machine to reduce external sounds that might startle your puppy.
 - A calming environment can help your puppy feel more secure while you're away.

Is It Anxiety or a Temper Tantrum?

Sometimes it can be hard to tell whether your puppy is experiencing separation anxiety or simply throwing a tantrum. Use this quick test to help determine the cause:

1. Place high-value food on the floor (e.g., wet dog food, chicken, or steak).
2. Walk into another room or step outside.
3. Observe your puppy's behavior:
 - **If your dog ignores the food and continues to show signs of stress (pacing, whining, or destruction)**, this could indicate true separation anxiety.
 - **If your dog eats the food and then starts vocalizing (barking, whining)**, this is likely a temper tantrum. In this case, ignore the behavior and only return when your puppy is quiet to avoid reinforcing unwanted vocalizations.
 - **If the puppy starts biting the crate bars or continues to vocalize for an extended period (more than a few minutes)**, this may indicate separation anxiety rather than a temper tantrum.

Note: For a deeper understanding of your puppy's behavior and to ensure you're addressing the underlying cause, consider reaching out to a certified professional trainer. They can help differentiate between anxiety and typical behavior challenges and create a tailored plan to support your puppy.





Building Confidence and Independence

By following these tips, you'll help raise a confident and behaviorally stable puppy:

- 1. Practice Gradually:** Start with short absences and slowly extend the time you're away.
- 2. Stay Consistent:** Consistency helps your puppy learn what to expect and reduces stress.
- 3. Be Patient:** Building independence takes time, especially for young puppies.

With these simple strategies, you'll be setting your puppy up for success, creating a healthy, confident dog who feels secure both with you and on their own.

Separation Anxiety Prevention Games to practice at home!

Why Play These Games?

- To build positive associations with the crate and being alone.
- To prevent separation anxiety by fostering calmness and independence.

Key Points to Remember:

- **Practice 1 exercise per day.**
- **Always potty your puppy before playing any of the games.**
- These exercises are best done after your puppy has had physical activity (e.g., a walk or playtime).

In each exercise, you'll encounter reference to **desired** and **undesirable behaviors**.

- **Desired behaviors:** Sitting, being quiet, laying down, standing still (with some movement acceptable), playing with appropriately left toys (Kongs, Toppls).
- **Undesirable behaviors:** Vocalizations, chewing, pawing, urinating, jumping, spinning.

If undesirable behaviors occur more than **4 times within a month**, please contact your trainer.



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1. I Love My Crate Game

Why Play This Game?

This game teaches your puppy to enjoy being alone in their crate, reducing anxiety and building positive associations with the crate.

Equipment:

- A Kong (no smaller than your dog's muzzle)
- Kong filler: Peanut butter, pumpkin puree, water-soaked kibble, mashed banana (can be frozen for longer-lasting use)
- Crate (large enough for your dog to sit upright)

Steps:

1. Put the Kong and puppy into the crate at the same time.
2. Allow your puppy to enjoy the Kong as you relax around the house for **5-15 minutes**.
3. Do not acknowledge your puppy during this time (no saying hi or goodbye).
4. Approach the crate only when your puppy is calm and quiet. Let them out and take the Kong away.

Troubleshooting:

- If your puppy begins to fuss or show undesirable behaviors, wait **3 minutes** of calm quiet behavior before letting them out.
- If you are unable to wait, contact a trainer immediately.
- If your puppy urinates while in the crate, take them outside immediately, clean the crate, and start over.

2. The "Alone Time" Game

Why Play This Game?

This game teaches your puppy to be comfortable playing with appropriate toys when you are not home, preventing excessive vocalization or crate-door biting.

Equipment:

- A Kong (no smaller than your dog's muzzle)
- Kong filler: Peanut butter, pumpkin puree, water-soaked kibble, mashed banana (can be frozen for longer-lasting use)
- Crate (large enough for your dog to sit upright)





Steps:

1. Do not acknowledge the puppy when leaving or returning to the house/apartment.
2. Put the Kong and puppy into the crate at the same time.
3. Prepare to leave (grab keys, purse, shoes, etc.).
4. Start timing when the door closes (use the chart below for session durations).

Sessions:

Session	Duration (min)	Undesirable Behaviors?
1	5	Yes / No If yes, please list:
2	10	Yes / No If yes, please list:
3	8	Yes / No If yes, please list:
4	4	Yes / No If yes, please list:

5. After completing all four sessions with no undesirable behaviors, add 5 minutes to each session and start again.
6. Do not add more than 15 minutes per week.

Troubleshooting:

- If your puppy shows any undesirable behaviors (vocalizing, chewing, biting crate bars, etc.), do not return to the house. Wait for appropriate behavior before continuing

