



PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

Canine Master on Pet Life Radio - Episode #4 Separation Anxiety – How to Fix the Cause and Not the Symptoms

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Hi, I'm your host Chris Onthank, and welcome to the Canine Master Radio Show. Today we're going to talk about separation anxiety and how to treat the cause and not just the symptoms.

You know, this is a very popular topic. Everybody talks about separation anxiety and every week I got clients that are coming to me saying, "Chris, my dog is ripping up the house. He's crying, he's barking, lots of behavioral issues when I leave. How do we figure this out and how do we fix it?"

Well, we've got lots to cover today.

So what is separation anxiety? You know, many kinds of dogs will show signs of anxiety as soon as the owner starts to leave the house or prepares to leave for the day. They start panting. They start pacing back and forth. They start salivating and barking and whining.

I've even seen clients' dogs actually start to get aggressive to them as they try to leave the house. It can get really to be an issue. I recently had a client that came to me, whose dog was so bad that they've never left the dog alone, I think, for a year and a half or something kind of crazy like that.

Literally when one leaves, the other one stays because the dog has such anxiety levels and they don't want to leave the dog alone. This can really become a real problem for people just trying to live a normal life. So what do we do when we see the triggers? What happens is, is that the dogs will start to do this when they recognize certain cues or triggers that the owner is leaving. Sort of like when you pick up your keys, that's a big trigger to the dog.

The dog will start reacting. When you put on your jacket, when you say, "Mommy's going to be right back. Oh, don't worry, I'll miss you today. I'll be right back, baby." These are the kind of things that will put the dog in a panic mode. Dog will start to go, "Oh, my gosh, she's leaving. What am I going to do? What am I going to do?" A dog will start going crazy. So I've even seen dogs start to defecate when the owners start to leave. Many behaviors out there have a common answer to this kind of problem.

What they tell you to do is they say, "We are going to desensitize the dog to you leaving. We're going to start to desensitize the dog to you picking up your keys." You put on your jacket and then you take it off and you wait a while, you leave for five minutes, you come back and you gradually increase your time.

You know the problem with this technique is that it takes forever. I mean, how long can you stay in your house and gradually build up the time that you're away and it becomes effective? It could be weeks and weeks and weeks and, hey, listen, we've got to go to work. What are we going to do?

So it's really unrealistic for you to do this technique. I have found, I've seen people try it and they all get very, very frustrated. And then basically your dog will start learning the new triggers, so it really is not a solution in my mind. I've not even known of a time that it did work. Maybe there's some people out there that have tried it and it has happened and I'd like to hear about that, but I have found that it is not realistic.

You go to your veterinarian and you'll say, "What do I do? My dog's going crazy. I can't even go to work." They're going to try to probably prescribe a drug called Clomicalm. I think this can work. It can help in a behavior modification program, but alone, a lot of times it makes your dog very lethargic. I have also seen that if you increase the Clomicalm prescription, go talk to your veterinarian and have them read the veterinary handbook that they usually have. They may recommend now, the new recommendation is to increase the dose.

There's a lot of holistic medicines out there, such as Rescue Remedy. Rescue Remedy is basically something that you can find at a health food store. You can add it to the water. I've seen that help, but again, it's not the perfect fix.

Dr. Harvey makes a wonderful product called Relax, that I've seen shown good results. There's another product called Nature's Vet, makes a whole range of calming remedies. Might try one of those. One of the best products I have seen, though, is something called the Calming Collar and it's made by Sergeants. They make the flea and tick collar. It has pheromones and lavender in it and it lasts for about 30 days. I have seen good results there.

There's a plugin unit that releases calming pheromones called Comfort Zone. I have used that as well. That's made by Farnam. You can get that at your pet store. It's a plugin unit. It releases this into a room. I have seen it have some results, but again, it's not 100% at all. And of course, I will tell you there's an edible treat called Calm Canine and it's made by Dale Edgar Brand. It's a chewable nugget treat.

Again, all of these solutions treat the symptoms of separation anxiety, but they don't get to the cause. Really, if you only treat the symptoms, the behavior is going to keep on coming back. You're going to be reliant on these quick fixes and I don't think that they ever are long lasting.

If we really want to fix separation anxiety, we need to understand where the problem is coming from and then fix the cause and not the symptoms. Five years ago, I was on my farm and I was up on my upper porch. I was looking outside and I saw a coyote, and it was around one of my stone walls. It was probably no more than 25, 30 yards from my house.

The coyote had made a den in the stone wall. Well, I watched the coyote coming and going out of this den and then quickly realized that she was having some pups in there. One day, I actually took the opportunity when I saw her leave. It was in the afternoon. I went down to the stone wall and I peered in.

I could see about six little, small pups lying there very quietly. One even looked up at me, but didn't move. Just stayed almost really frozen and very quiet and waiting for their mom to return. When the mom returned later, her quiet babies saw her and got very excited, but they were really quiet when they were away.

So about six weeks after that, I was up on my porch and I saw the mother coyote panting and pacing and running back and forth and yipping all around the den. At first, I didn't understand what was going on. And soon I noticed that there was a pup missing, because I could see it walking across my pond, walking on the other side. I realized that the reason why the mother was so freaked out and was traumatized was that she had lost one of her pups.

Well, you know what? 30 minutes later, that young pup returned and the mom finally calmed down. But we see similar behaviors with a litter of puppies. As a kid, I used to watch my grandmother do temperament testing of puppies. And we would take the mother out of the situation or we'd take a puppy away from the mother. The mother typically would start freaking out that one of her puppies was away.

So when you leave your house, think about what your dog may be feeling. If your dog thinks of you as one of its pups or one of its puppies, you're going to create an anxious dog. This is the cause of separation anxiety. The cause of separation anxiety generally happens when the dog feels that it is in charge of your comings and goings. When your dog feels that it is in charge of the territory. When your dog feels it is in charge of basically you. Basically, when you leave your dog, your dog is going, "Oh, my gosh, I've lost one of my puppies." And the dog sees you at as one of its puppies.

So in these cases, we really need to change the role. We need to take your dog from chairman of the board down to that mail room. If you become the leader of the family by making you more dominant in that space and you in charge of the comings and goings, you're going to find that you're going to be treating the cause and not just dealing with the symptoms, and actually the symptoms will go away.

How do we become the leader and how do we become dominant in the territory and make these crazy behaviors of separation anxiety go away?

We had talked about that you needed to be in charge of the comings and goings with your dog. That you need to be in charge of the area or the territory and that this would be actually treating the cause of separation anxiety and not just basically treating the symptoms.

There are certain signals that all dogs know that determine what we'll call family order or pack order. Your dog knows these signals. One of them is winning elevated areas: top of the

stairs, couches, beds, chairs. These are the places that when a dog is elevated, he really, really, really feels that he is in charge.

The leader will usually elevate himself and look over the territory. It's sort of like a lookout. So one of the things you need to do is you need to get your dog off of your elevated areas and eventually you can invite your dog up on invitation.

But I would not just let your dog think that it's able to get up in elevated areas. Because when you invite your dog up onto the couch, you're saying, "Come on up. You're a leader too." And remember the reason why your dog is going crazy when you leave is because he feels as though he's an equal leader or the leader himself.

The other thing that you want to do is make sure you're going first through your doorways. Upstairs, downstairs, all thresholds, you really need to go first. I would not use obedience commands. I would use sort of what we call body pressure and maybe even a guttural tone.

So when you start going through the doorway and the dog is accompanying you, you might go, "Anh" and then put a little bit of body pressure on him. Then as you step through, "Come on. Come on, Cindy. Let's go." You know, encourage the dog through after. The dog must naturally acquiesce going through all your doorways, because the leader goes first, because he's in charge of who comes into the territory and where they go and directs the hunt. So going first is an important thing.

The other thing you want to do is, and this is really important for separation anxiety, is that no matter where the leader is, the leader owns. So if you walk around your dog or step over him, what you're basically saying is that you're dominant in the space. So by walking through your dog, I tell people to walk through their dogs like 20 times a day if they're having issues with separation anxiety.

When you move them, you're going to find that your dog is going to see you dominant in the space. When you go to move them, don't say anything. Say nothing, because you want your dog to start watching you more and taking your lead. If you say, "Excuse me. Cindy, will you move?" then she doesn't need to watch you.

A dog is watching you all the time is taking your lead. So what you want to do is by moving your dog, you're going to find that your dog is going to start lying in corners and out of the way and underneath things, and that's what you want.

You see a dog that lies in the middle of the floor is actually being dominant in the space. If the dog is lying close to you where you can touch them if you're sitting on the couch and he's lying right next to you on the floor, he's not being dominant. But if he's lying in the entrance to the room, if he's lying on a threshold, if he's lying in the center of the floor, as I said before, your dog is being dominant in the space.

So go ahead and move them. You walk up to your dog. If he doesn't get out of your way, take your foot and gently nudge him. Do not kick your dog. This is not cruel, folks. This is just being dominant in this space.

Remember your dog, most dogs don't want to be leaders. They're basically alpha wannabes. They're followers. So by moving your dog, you're saying you're dominant. You do not move your dog, again, if he's lying very close to you, if he's lying underneath the table, in the corner out of the way. That's when you don't move your dog.

One of the things that I also tell people to do is to start and end all your interactions. You see, the leader determines when he wants to be pet, when he's done, when he wants to play and when he's done, and when he wants to leave the territory and when he comes back. The leader is in charge of all interactions, so you need to be in charge of those interactions.

I am certainly not saying not to pet your dog for gosh ... That's why we got a dog in the first place. It lowers our blood pressure. And for me, this is truly the hardest signal for me to do personally. I have a dog come up to me and I'm a sucker. I start petting them right away. But try to control all your interactions.

You determine when you're going to go out and play with your dog. You're determined when you're going to pet your dog. If your dog starts nudging you, pushing at you, barking at you for petting or play, stand up, put a little forward body pressure on him and push him away from you gently, like about six to eight feet and keep on repeating it. Before you know it, your dog's going to know that you're dominant in that space. When your dog is no longer in the decision process for the territory, he's going to start to relax.

So one other thing you might try doing is controlling what you say to your dog when you leave. The worst thing you could possibly do is to go to your dog and say, "Mommy's going to be right back. Don't worry." Really, the dog starts setting up that something's wrong.

Then the other thing that you don't want to do when you come back is overexcitement: "Oh, my God, I missed you today." So the dog will start anticipating your return, and this can create anxiety. Gosh, it causes anxiety for me.

I mean, the thing is, can you imagine if you came home? I can't imagine my wife coming up to me and jumping all over me and getting all excited to see me. I'd say, "Oh, my God. You're crazy." When I come home, I'm, "Hey. Hi, Sweetie. How are you?" Give her a peck on the cheek and that's about it. That's kind of what you should do with your dog: "Hey, Cindy. How are you?" A little pat pat and into the house you come in and look at your mail and do your thing.

Don't make your comings and goings big events. Really keep them low key. So if you're doing that, that will also help. One of the worst things you can do, what I tell people to do is, is when you come home, wait about five minutes or so before you do your greeting and make your greeting kind of calm.

All right. One of the big things you want to do is take dog beds and crates and stick them underneath things and in corners out of the way. Do not put your dog crate in your foyer, in your mud room, because what you're doing is you're sticking your dog by the door. He's also thinking, "Oh, I'm in charge of the comings and goings." By putting your crate in your

mud room or your entrance way, it also is going to make your dog have much crazier greetings with strangers. That's just on a side note.

Do not, also, put your dog bed in front of your TV, where you guys are all sitting there staring at the TV. The dog's mind. you guys are all sitting there watching me as you watch TV and you're watching the leader. So underneath things and in corners out of the way is where you want to put your dog beds. And if you continue to move your dog, you're going to find that your dog will seek out these areas.

I get a lot of people that will say to me, "Hey, Chris, my dog doesn't use the dog bed. He likes to lie in the middle of the floor." Well, when you start moving them, they actually start seeking out these submissive areas. You want to create kind of like a den for your dog. I sometimes will take a crate and put a blanket over it and make it dark.

I also will put on a little bit of music or I put the TV on when I am away, so the dog gets to hear that noise that is normally going on when I'm around. If I'm one that listens to music, I'll put on nice, classical music, leave it on for the dog and I'll leave and I'll make a very low profile exit. The dog will many times be calm.

Back to putting my dogs in crates and underneath things. Make sure that your dog, when you're there, you'll find your dog will start seeking out these places. And what you'll find is, is that when you leave, your dog will seek out these places and they'll be much calmer.

This is what I would do. You will find that when you do this, your dog is going to be much more relaxed and we will be, again, treating the cause and not your symptoms. Okay.

Listen, we have a caller on the line. Jaimee, is there somebody here?

Jaimee: Yes, I believe Emily from Stamford on the line and she has a question about separation anxiety. And is it okay for dogs to be in the bed?

Chris: Okay. Hi Emily, it's Chris Onthank, Canine Master. How are you today?

Emily: Good. How are you doing, Canine Master?

Chris: I'm doing great. I saw that you had actually asked the question on the Ask the Canine Master question platform, and you'd asked me the question on there. I think it's great that you wanted to call in today. So Emily, tell me a little bit about what's going on with your dog.

Emily: Excellent. Well, I have a little miniature dachshund and I've had her for about two years and she's very close to me. She's always next to me. We've been sleeping in the same bed from day one, so she's always in bed. At this point in my life, I'm starting to date and I would like to get her out of the bed. But I'm afraid that she might be going through some separation anxiety, because she gets very upset when she's not with me or she's in a different room. So how can I transition her into her own space, so I can have my own space without making her upset?

Chris: You know, this is really a common thing. I see dogs sometimes even get jealous when people start having a partner sleep in the bed with them. Is that kind of what's going on?

Emily: It's exactly what's going on. She's always the center of attention. So now that she's not, it's been very difficult. So ...

Chris: It's not helping your love life, is what you're telling me.

Emily: It's not. No, it's putting a burden on it. So I would like to get the problem fixed.

Chris: So what we want to do is, I don't know whether you've been able to listen to the rest of the show, but basically we need to change the way the dog views your relationship.

Emily: Okay.

Chris: What's her name again?

Emily: Her name is Madeline.

Chris: Madeline. Well, what I would do is I would take Madeline and I love dachshunds, by the way. I'd also want to tell you I grew up with a dachshund underneath my arm my whole childhood, in bed. So I get it. Sleeping with dachshunds, I think, is one of the coolest things going and there's just so cuddly.

Emily: Yeah.

Chris: But here's the thing, is that it's going to create anxiety if the dog is on an elevated area with you all the time. I tell people two things. First of all, if the dog's going to be in bed with you, it should be at the foot of your bed, not up by your head and sleeping on your pillow where it's dominating you.

Emily: She definitely likes to get under the sheets and really burrow right next to me, so that's another problem.

Chris: I think the first thing is we need to make the elevated area a place that you kind of own, that it's your place.

Emily: Okay.

Chris: So if you were to take a dog bed and stick it next to you on the floor, you could put it in like a little corner, tuck it in somewhere. And you might even, with either a flat collar or a harness, put that on her and clip what I call a tether line to her. Now you want to make sure nothing is constricting. This is going to help her stay down and not jump up in the middle of the night.

Emily: Okay.

Chris: And you put your dog bed on the ground. You might take that tether line and tie it around the dresser, a foot to the dresser, or find something you can tie it to.

Emily: Okay.

Chris: I would make sure the tether line's about four to five feet long for a miniature dachshund. But I would make sure that she's on the floor where she can't jump up. The first few nights is not going to be great for you, so probably do it on a weekend so you're not at work. I don't know if you go to work, but if you're at work, you're going to have a bad day that day because you're going to get no sleep.

Emily: Yeah.

Chris: And what I would do is I would stick her on the floor and start making that the new pattern. Sometimes you can invite her up on invitation if you have those lonely nights. But the thing is, is that I would mostly keep her on the ground and make it a privilege to get on the elevated areas. Let me ask you a question. Just she jump on the elevated areas around the house? Couches, beds, chairs as well?

Emily: She does and I'm guilty of that, because I provide ramps to let her do that. So I need to remove those, I think, is what you're telling me, and make that my space.

Chris: Yeah. So ramps, you know? We see these people that have these stairs that get their dog to get up on there and that's actually great. You got to be careful with dachshunds going up and down stairs. But my point is, is that you would get the dog, be on the floor and then invite the dog up. And you can actually lift the dog up. I don't know. Is she able to jump up onto the bed by herself?

Emily: She's not, but she will bark and let me know that she's there and wants up on the bed.

Chris: Okay. Well, so I guess what I'm saying is that I would start creating little dens for her, so then when you leave to go to work, she's underneath and in corners out of the way.

Emily: Okay.

Chris: I would make that bed really comfortable in your bedroom.

Emily: Okay.

Chris: You can you say, "Huh, I'm right here," when she's lying next to you. By locking her out of the bedroom, I think that's going to be a really big transition for her and it probably is not going to work as well. I would probably get her in your bedroom but on the floor. And real soon, you're going to find that she just really likes it and then you won't need the tether line.

I typically find people, you need the tether line for about a week. Now, obviously, you would never leave her there alone with a tether line on, because you don't want her ever to strangle. And of course nothing constricting. But that should work really well for you.

Emily: Okay, great. That's some great advice. I hope that it will help my dating life and let me have my space and her space.

Chris: I hope it will help your dating life too. Yeah.

Emily: I would like my own space back. That would be nice.

Chris: I'm sure. I'm sure. Well, Emily, please keep us posted, and let us know how it works. We do have other fixes that we can give you, but I think that's a great first start.

Emily: Okay, excellent. Thank you so much for your advice.

Chris: Well, thank you so much for calling in.

Emily: Alrighty. Thanks. Bye. Bye.

Chris: Okay, Jaimee, do we have any other questions?

Jaimee: Yes, we do. We have a few questions today. Our first question is from Mark from Boise, Idaho. He asks if getting another dog would fix the separation anxiety issues that he's presently having with his only dog when he leaves for work. Is getting another dog a good fix?

Chris: Well, a lot of people ask me this question. That is a great question, Jaimee. The problem is, is that many times getting another dog before you've addressed the initial issue only will make the behavior worse. Getting another dog that is also anxious and not fixing your relationship will actually add more pressure to the dog to control the pack. You're just adding more to the pack.

So what I would try to do is do the techniques that I showed you about becoming more dominant in the space and getting rid of the separation anxiety. Then if you get another dog, you will find that if you do the same techniques with that dog, both your dogs will be really happy when you leave. They'll have each other as company. So getting another dog can help, but it needs to be after you fixed your problem.

Any other questions, Jaimee?

Jaimee: Yes. Sarah from Miami, Florida asks why her dog is so much better after a day of daycare than a day home alone. And is there any way to get the same result at home so she doesn't have to put her in daycare all the time?

Chris: Well, that's a great question too. The difference is, is that when you bring a dog to doggy daycare, it's not in your territory. So the dog is playing with his friends and not being alone in the territory that it thinks it controls.

So why do people find that their dogs are much better when they had been a dog daycare all day long? Well, the reason for that is, is that the dog has been getting crazy amounts of exercise. So I tell people that before you leave your dog in the morning, go get them a good

run or go throw the ball for them, get some exercise before you leave the house. This many times will keep the dog exhausted and less reactive when you leave.

Jaimee: Chris, I actually have another question. This is from a friend of mine who has tried several of these techniques with some success. They live in New York City and they have a small dog who they leave and they both work. They asked me about in this day of technology, there's a lot of options for pets. There's the iCPooch and some remote feeders that you can give treats on a variable schedule from a remote. She wants to know what you thought about those types of tools.

Chris: There's two products that you're talking about, Jaimee, and one of them I actually have seen cause reverse results. The one that I have seen cause reverse results, and I don't mean to bash any products, is the iCPet. I think it's great for you to be looking at your own dog, but when your dog can see you, it adds to frustration. It can actually make the dog have more separation anxiety.

Because what happens is you're there and then you disappear. And I heard of one client whose dog just sat by the iCPet monitor and the dog was just sitting there all day long. So I think it's great for you look at your own pet, but when your dog gets to see glimpses of you and he gets the frustration that it can't be with you, it may actually add to the frustration.

As far as the remote feeders on a variable schedule, and that's where the treat dispenses and I guess you can dispense your treat as remotely when you're at your office. You can give your dog a few more treats and maybe talk to your dog. I think that may be a great thing. I think that anything on a variable schedule where a dog gets addicted to a device, the dog is now focusing on that device and not to you being away.

But again, let's talk about this. This is also treating the symptoms. It's not really getting to the reason why the dog is having separation anxiety. And the reason why your dog is having separation anxiety is that in most cases, it sees you as one of its puppies and you don't want to be one of its puppies. You want to be your dog's leader and you control the comings and goings. Pretty soon, you're going to find that that separation anxiety goes away.

All right, well that's it for today and be sure to visit canine-master.com that's C-A-N-I-N-E-M-A-S-T-E-R.com. You can always click on Ask the Canine Master and leave your questions for me. I will do my best to get back to you, and I may even have you call in to the show with your questions. So send me your videos and your photos, so I can see what's going on with your dog and I will help you master the solution with your dog.

Goodbye for now and see you next time on Canine Master Radio, where I will continue to help you master the relationship with your dog.