

Separation Anxiety in Dogs

How to treat your dogs separation anxiety.

Jon Geller, DVM

Posted: Tue May 31 00:00:00 PDT 2005

Q. Our family adopted a dog named Max. He was found abandoned off the highway in Northern California with no collar. After searching the newspapers and putting up signs, no previous family came forward. I took him to the vet the day we got him and he is a healthy and very loveable dog. The vet told us he is about 18 months old and has not been neutered.

Max is a well-behaved, obedient, family dog. Our problem is that he cannot be left alone. He barks non-stop when we leave him. We think he was abused by his prior owners because when my husband's male friend picked up a 2x4 to work on his deck, Max yelped and cowered. He is also very much my dog as he follows me from room to room, and is more wary of my husband, so we believe it was a man who beat him. We can take him anywhere with us. He isn't hyperactive and doesn't bark or jump.

The problem is when we leave him alone. We've been told he has separation anxiety. At first, we left him in the backyard, but he ate through a 6-inch section of fence to get out. My parents doggie-sat him for us on a weekend, and the hour they left he chewed through their fence to get out and go to the neighbors house. He just wants to be with people. We then purchased and put in an invisible fence but he just walked right through.

I spoke to a behaviorist who suggested we try cratetraining so that even if he barked it would be inside the house and the neighbors wouldn't hear. We worked with him, but the first time we actually left him for alone, he chewed through the crate and got out. His gums were bleeding!

We tried to leave him in the house by himself, thinking he would be happy, but he destroyed our couch, then tore the blinds, curtains and screen off the front window to get out. My husband and I do a lot of work from home so Max is only home alone a few days a week.

A. It's time for drugs! This sounds like one of the worst, and one of the most classic, cases of separation anxiety I have heard of. Separation anxiety is an amazingly strong response in dogs, with stories of chewing through crates, doors and fences along with very destructive behavior and vocalization. There usually is some previous history of abandonment or abuse.

My first thought would be that you should consider either:

1. Taking Max with you to work.
2. Having him spend the day at doggie daycare.
3. Have someone be in the house with him when you're gone.