

## Manage Your Dog's Separation Anxiety With Crating

**A dog expert answers questions about canine behavior.**

*Brian Kilcommons*

Posted: Tue Nov 6 00:00:00 PST 2001

**Q:** I have an American Bulldog who is well behaved, but when I leave him alone he tears things up and urinates all over the place. He even dragged my loveseat to the middle of the floor and destroyed it. Can you help?

**A:** Separation anxiety is such a distressing problem. One of the hardest things to do is to stop all reaction and correction. This only makes the dog more fearful, increasing stress and destructiveness.

Start introducing a safe place in your home in this case a plastic crate is a good bet. Most importantly, introduce the crate slowly and in a positive way. Start throwing treats into the crate, feed your dog in the crate and use it when you are home. A hollow, rubber chew toy or sterilized bone smeared on the inside with peanut butter, cream cheese or liverwurst will interest most dogs. Place a piece of your worn clothing in the crate; your scent will help calm him.

Most people make the common mistake of using a crate only when leaving the dog. This will make the crate a place your dog doesn't like. To avoid this, crate your dog for short periods of time when you are home.

Once your dog has become comfortable in his crate, start leaving him for short periods of time. Do not press the issue, however. Go through your normal routine, leave for a few minutes and return. Gradually increase the length of time you are gone from the room. Use a tape recorder to find out how he reacts when being left.

Remember to work with your dog calmly before leaving; lavish him with attention and praise when he listens to you. Many times, dogs suffering from separation are given attention on demand and for doing nothing at all. This sort of indiscriminate attention only confuses the dog making separation problems worse. Have him come, sit, or down before giving him attention or treats. Do not reward demanding or fearful behavior with attention. This includes him pawing, nudging or barking for attention.

Exercise, structure, training and desensitization (gradually leaving for short periods of time) should put you and your dog on the right track, but this can be a hard problem to get turned around. You might consider short-term use of medication along with the changes in management.