

When Your Dog Can't Be Left Alone

Understanding separation anxiety
and working on it in small steps



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Part I • What happens when the door closes

The moment this is about

You pull the door shut. Maybe you still hear something, maybe it's quiet. Maybe you turn around halfway down the stairs because you can't stand it.

And then for two hours you have no idea what's happening.

That's the gap this workbook is about. Not what you find when you come back, but what happened in between—the part you've only ever known from the traces it leaves.

What you have so far

Probably a mix of three things. What you heard while you were still in the building. What the neighbors tell you, usually vague and usually about the loud days. And what you see when you get back.

All three say less than they seem to. The noise in the stairwell is the first minute, not the fortieth. Neighbors hear what stands out, not what came after. And the dog greeting you at the door may have calmed down long ago and only revved up again when he heard your key.

On that basis you can't decide whether anything is getting better. That's exactly why so many people, months in, still can't say whether all the practice was worth it.

What this workbook does

It turns an impression into a number.

You record your dog while you're away. You look at what actually happens during that time. And you write down one single value: how long it took your dog to settle. You track that value over weeks, and it's what tells you whether to go longer, stay where you are, or go back a step.

That's all it is. It's a measuring method with a training part attached, and it's built so that at every single point you know where you stand.

What it doesn't do

It doesn't make a diagnosis. You'll be able to assess your dog, and that's something different from a diagnosis. Assessing means: this fits better here than there.

It doesn't replace a veterinary exam. Some of the dogs who can't be left alone are in pain or have a physical change that's connected to the behavior. No workbook will find that out.

It doesn't help every dog. Some dogs never settle at all while you're gone, and then there's no value to shorten. The workbook plans for this case, and it's covered in Part V. It isn't a failure of the method, and it certainly isn't a failure on your part.

It isn't quick. The time frame in which you can judge whether anything is happening is weeks, not days.

What you need

A camera—and that means the phone you already have. An old charging cable so it lasts through the recording. A spot from which you can see the area where your dog spends his time, usually the door and whatever's in front of it.

Plus the worksheets in this workbook and a pen. Nothing else.

If that already puts you off, please read Part III to the end anyway. It explains why it doesn't work without a recording, and the argument is stronger than the effort.

How to read on

Part II is the only part you can skip—if you're sure your dog isn't paying you back. Most people are less sure of that than they think.

Part III is the most important one. That's where you observe and assess, and that's where you find out which path is the right one for the two of you.

Part IV is the method. Part V is for when more is needed than a workbook can give.

Part II • Panic is not protest

The sentence almost everyone has thought at some point

He knows perfectly well he's not allowed to do that.

Maybe you've thought it yourself, maybe someone said it to you. It usually comes with an observation that seems to back it up: the dog looks guilty when you come through the door. So he knows what he did. And if he knows and does it anyway, he's doing it on purpose.

That chain of reasoning is broken, and right at the start.

What the guilty look is

What you see when you walk into your home is a reaction to you. To your tone of voice, your pace, the way you stand in the doorway. Dogs read that kind of thing extraordinarily well, and ducking, appeasing behavior is the obvious response when someone comes in tense.

Research on this points in the same direction: the guilty look depends more on how the human behaves than on what the dog actually did. That doesn't mean dogs don't make connections. It means this one look isn't what we take it for.

And even if your dog has linked the scratched door to your anger, that link forms when you come home. It says nothing about what was going on inside him three hours earlier, when he started scratching.

Why spite doesn't add up

Spite requires quite a lot. Your dog would have to assume you had an intention, feel hurt, make a plan and carry it out—knowing it would hit you later. That's a lot of prerequisites for a behavior that has a simpler explanation.

The simpler explanation: he feels awful, and what he does is what animals do when they feel awful and can't get away. Vocalize. Move around. Try to get to where you went. Work at the exit, because the exit is the spot where you disappeared.

None of it is aimed against you. All of it is aimed toward you.

Why it involves you, not just him

That your dog copes worse on his own than other dogs has to do with the bond between the two of you. At first, that's not a flaw but the normal case: for him, you're the point where tension settles again. When you're there, a lot regulates itself. When you leave, that very point disappears.

People often draw the wrong conclusion from this, and it's so widespread that it has to be spelled out here.

The wrong conclusion is: less closeness. The dog out of the bedroom, ignore him when he seeks contact, practice distance so he's less attached to you. It sounds logical, and it's still the wrong way. What happens isn't that the fear gets smaller. It just gets fewer chances to calm down.

What actually helps isn't less closeness but more reliable closeness. A dog who can count on you being available when you're there copes better with your absence than one for whom both are unpredictable.

Worksheet B • Video review

Fill in this worksheet while you go through the recording, not afterward from memory.

You can fast-forward as long as your dog is lying quietly. In all phases when he isn't lying down, watch in real time and with sound. Whining is quiet and gets lost when you fast-forward.

Date: _____ Length of recording: _____ Planned absence: _____

Min.	lying	standing / moving	vocalizing	at the door
1	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	☐	☐	☐	☐
5	☐	☐	☐	☐
6	☐	☐	☐	☐
7	☐	☐	☐	☐
8	☐	☐	☐	☐
9	☐	☐	☐	☐
10	☐	☐	☐	☐
11	☐	☐	☐	☐
12	☐	☐	☐	☐
13	☐	☐	☐	☐
14	☐	☐	☐	☐
15	☐	☐	☐	☐
20	☐	☐	☐	☐
25	☐	☐	☐	☐
30	☐	☐	☐	☐
35	☐	☐	☐	☐
40	☐	☐	☐	☐
45	☐	☐	☐	☐
50	☐	☐	☐	☐
55	☐	☐	☐	☐
60	☐	☐	☐	☐

Several checks in one row are correct if several things happened.

This is the end of the preview.

When Your Dog Can't Be Left Alone

The complete workbook has 29 pages and 6 worksheets to print out. You get it as a PDF right after purchase.

€9.90, one-time payment, no subscription.

Get the workbook:

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