

B-5 PROTOCOL FOR TEACHING YOUR DOG TO UNCOUPLE DEPARTURES AND DEPARTURE CUES

There are two components to beginning to teach dogs to *not* react anxiously when you leave them. The first involves resisting the normal tendency to reassure an unhappy dog, and the second involves teaching the dog not to respond to cues that tell it you might leave. Tier 2 of the program actually teaches the dog the third component, gradually learning to be left alone.

Dogs that become distressed after you have left probably became distressed before you left. You need to be alert for such cues as panting, pacing, whining, digging, trembling, not eating, and so on and ensure that you do not inadvertently reward such cues by telling the dog that it is "okay." The dog does not think it is okay, and you are rewarding and reinforcing the dog for being anxious. Rather, before the dog becomes distressed, even if it has just awakened, make every effort to reward the calm behavior. Talk happily to the dog, groom slowly, or massage and rub the dog's belly and chest. If the dog becomes upset when you leave, do not fuss over the dog. Try some of the initial Tier 1 exercises to determine whether these will calm the dog. If they do, reward the dog profusely. If they do not, proceed to leave, placing the dog in a crate or pen, if that is normal, and do not fuss over the dog. See "Protocol for Dogs with Separation Anxiety" for further details.

It is important to start to teach the dog that it can divorce the signals you give when you are about to leave from its anxiety at your departure. Remember, dogs read body language better than humans. The cues that you need to work on include all of those that induce anxiety as described previously.

When you are not leaving, start to go through the same routine that you pursue when departing. For example, if you always take your briefcase to work, pick it up and then watch television or read a book. If you always go to the health club with a gym bag, pick up your gym bag and make dinner. If you only wear high heels and makeup when you go to work, wear them instead on a Sunday and spend the day by the fire reading the newspaper. You get the idea.

Remember, you are responsible for identifying the cues that start to upset your dog. All dogs are different. Some dogs only react when the keys are picked up, others only when the car is started, some because of the hour at which their people awake when going to work, and still others because of the presence or absence of a meal or a type of food. These are typical examples; your dog may respond to something different.

Any specific event that triggers anxiety in your dog should be uncoupled from your actual departure.

In addition to using cues that signal to the dog that you are leaving, and then staying home, you can use cues that tell the dog you are staying home and then leave. For example, if you only eat breakfast on weekends when you stay home, start eating breakfast on weekdays. If you only wear jogging clothes on weekends, wear them to work and change there.

On days when you are not leaving the dog, you can start to develop some specific cues that tell the dog that you are not leaving. For example, you could play a specific, easily recognizable piece of music. You can then use this piece of music to help teach the dog to relax when you are leaving (or, by remote control, when you are not there). This is called a bridging stimulus and can be very useful in cases of milder anxieties or as animals begin to recover.

The anxiety induced by the specific event that your dog associates with your departure is often a self-fulfilling prophecy. If the dog can be taught to not become anxious in the first place at the time when the cues are given, this will help the dog learn to not be anxious when you are gone. Remember that what we know about anxiety indicates that it is a *cascade type of phenomenon*: once you get upset, it is easier to become more upset more quickly.

Antianxiety medications may help some dogs that otherwise are unable to succeed in this program. Remember, if it is decided that medication could benefit your dog, you need to use it *in addition* to the behavior modification, not instead of it.