

**FREEDOM FROM FEAR:**

HOW TO SOLVE YOUR DOG'S  
***SEPARATION***  
***ANXIETY***



WRITTEN BY PET LIVING WITH KRISTEN LEVINE  
IN COLLABORATION WITH DOGTV

# FREEDOM FROM FEAR: HOW TO SOLVE YOUR DOG'S SEPARATION ANXIETY

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PET LIVING  
WITH  
KRISTEN LEVINE

IN COLLABORATION  
WITH DOGTV



FROM THE  
*Author*



I've been  
where you are.

If your dog has separation anxiety, whether it's mild or severe or somewhere in between, it's deeply affecting your life and even your bond with your dog. It's most certainly affecting your dog's quality of life.

Several years ago, when I adopted my dog, Buck, he quickly became attached to me. That attachment morphed into an unhealthy separation anxiety, to the point where I had to put my car in neutral and quietly roll out of the garage so he wouldn't hear me leave.

My husband, Paul, and I took separate vacations for years just to keep Buck's peace.

When Buck was left alone, he would chew through door knobs, door casings, and even drywall in an attempt to escape the anxiety he felt when he was home alone.

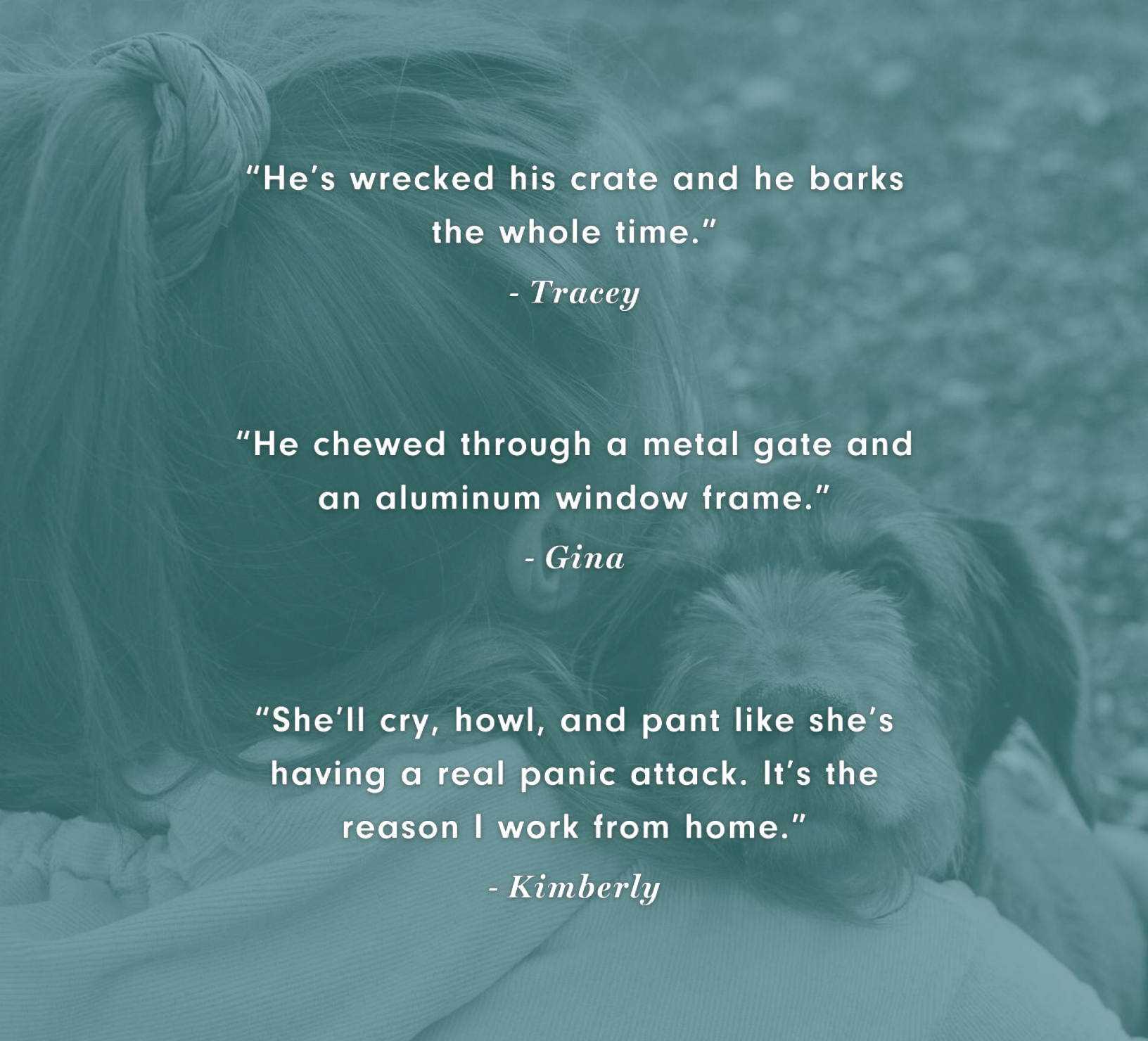
Separation anxiety isn't just an inconvenience. It's a quality of life issue, and for dogs like Buck, it can even become a safety issue.

With the help of my good friends at DOGTV, I created this guide to help pet parents whose dogs are suffering from separation anxiety.

In the following pages, I'll walk you through the important steps you need to take to successfully manage your dog's separation anxiety.

Here's to living your very best lives together in peace!

*Kristen Levine*



“He’s wrecked his crate and he barks  
the whole time.”

- *Tracey*

“He chewed through a metal gate and  
an aluminum window frame.”

- *Gina*

“She’ll cry, howl, and pant like she’s  
having a real panic attack. It’s the  
reason I work from home.”

- *Kimberly*

Separation anxiety affects about one in three dogs.\* It can totally disrupt your life, and it makes your dog absolutely miserable. For most pet parents, it’s simply not feasible to spend all day and night with their dog, no matter how much they love them!

In this guide, you’ll learn how to make your leaving the house “no big deal” for both you and your dog.

# Signs Your Dog Has *Separation Anxiety*

For dogs without separation anxiety, they relish their doggy downtime when their humans leave the house and use it to sleep or relax. They're not panicked about being alone, and they happily but calmly greet their people when they arrive home.

For dogs with separation anxiety, the story is very different.

The anxiety often sets in long before the front door shuts. Your dog has likely picked up on signals that you'll be leaving soon, like when you curl your hair or grab your keys or shoes. This can lead to early signs like:

- Pacing
- Panting
- Becoming clingy or following you around
- Whining



These are early warning signs that your dog could be gearing up for a full-blown panic attack when you leave.



You might even be tuned into this already and cuddle them or speak to them in a high voice in an effort to try and make them feel better. "I'll be home soon!" you might tell them.

These little acts further confirm your dog's worst fears: soon, they'll be "abandoned."

Once the front door shuts, your dog's panic begins to set in. Veterinary Behaviorist Lisa Radosta, DVM, DACVB explains what happens when your dog panics.

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“There is a release of neurochemicals in the brain that affects neurochemicals in the rest of the body and hormones. It's a big cascade of events during a panic attack. Once your dog mounts that stress response... the body is physiologically activated, and that can't be endured on a chronic basis and have the pet continue to be healthy.” †

”

**AN ESCALATED  
STRESS RESPONSE  
MAY  
MANIFEST AS:**

- **Property destruction (potentially leading to self-harm)**
- **Inappropriate elimination**
- **Heavy drooling**
- **Hyperventilating**
- **Barking or howling**

At this point, your dog is in full panic mode. So how do you help your dog regain their calm and actually enjoy their time alone?

First, let's talk about several reasons why your dog has separation anxiety.

# 5 REASONS WHY YOUR DOG *Panics Without You*



It can be really easy to blame yourself for your dog's separation anxiety. Believe it or not, though, it's not about you!

There are several reasons why a dog might develop separation anxiety, and many are beyond anyone's control.

## DNA

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Some dogs are simply more genetically prone to developing separation anxiety than others.

Just as we see anxiety run in human families, the same can be true of dogs. They can't help it any more than they can change their eye color.

Pamela's dog, Zuzu, is terrified of the sound of the wind. But when it comes to being left alone, she couldn't care less! Certain anxiety triggers, by nature, affect dogs differently.

## TRAUMA

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If you rescued your dog, it's hard to know what their former situation was like. If they were abandoned, those feelings of abandonment don't go away quickly - and sometimes they never go away at all.

Dogs become attached to their people, and, more often than not, one person specifically. If that person leaves them for any reason, it can be very traumatic.

Dog mom Tracey says her dog has "very severe separation anxiety through no fault of his own." She continues, "No one wanted him anymore, and I saved him from his demise." Tracey is Krui's sixth mom, so it's easy to understand why he fears being left alone yet again.

Heidi tells a similar story about her dog, Larry, who was abandoned in a park. "Larry always has to be by my side," she says. "If I get out of bed, Larry gets out of bed. He follows me everywhere."

# CHANGE IN ROUTINE

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Dogs thrive on routine and stability. When they can't have that, or when it's suddenly taken away from them, it can seem like their world has been turned upside down.

During the pandemic, more dogs were adopted than ever before. However, after months or years of working from home, some pet parents have returned to the office, leaving their dogs alone all day for the first time ever.

Other changes in routine that can really impact a dog's anxiety include the loss of a loved one, either fur or human.



## NOISE ANXIETY

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As many as 40% of dogs are afraid of noises, and they may show signs of noise anxiety that can worsen when they're home alone.\*

Repeated exposure to terrifying noises while your dog is home alone may lead to separation anxiety. These might include construction noises, thunder, or firing ranges.

## AGE RELATED COGNITIVE DECLINE

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Lastly, your dog's separation anxiety may be caused by the aging process. Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome (CDS) and its symptoms appear in about 23% of dogs between the ages of 12 and 14 and about 41% of dogs 14 and older.

This can cause them to become confused, much like an Alzheimer's patient. If they're home alone, their irrational thoughts and feelings may cause them to act out.

Despite the many causes of separation anxiety in dogs, you are not the cause of the problem, but you are a huge part of the solution.





# HOW TO SOLVE YOUR DOG'S SEPARATION ANXIETY

Unfortunately, once a dog has separation anxiety, it's extremely difficult to root it out entirely. However, separation anxiety is manageable to the point where it's almost invisible.

Ongoing behavioral training, environmental enrichment, and in serious cases, consistent and proper use of medication can make the signs of separation anxiety nearly imperceptible.

So how do you get your dog to the point where your leaving is truly "no big deal?" Where you can leave for the day and not worry about your couch cushions being destroyed or the neighbors complaining about all-day barking or howling? Or where there are no "accidents" on the floor?

**Let's introduce you to the "BARRKS" method.**

B A R R K S

# Be Calm & Positive

Remember that your dog isn't intentionally acting out. They're literally in a panic, so you don't want to yell at them. Imagine if someone scolded you during a panic attack!

Gina, mentioned earlier, has successfully helped her rescue dogs to overcome separation anxiety, in part by being positive. She says, "Biggest thing is NOT to discipline when you come home and find stuff torn up."

She also advises that you start that positivity even before you walk in the door and see your dog. "Shed your worries of the day before you walk inside the house so you can have a calm happy return."



# Alone Time Gets Rewarded

Who doesn't love their dog's constant attention? It can make you feel like you're a rock star in your dog's eyes! Dog mom Tricia says about her dog, "I can't even go into a different room without her being upset."

However, this behavior isn't natural for dogs. In fact, Dr. Radosta cautions, **"When a dog follows you everywhere, that's pathologic. It's not love."**



To help your dog feel comfortable in a room without you, give them a toy that will occupy them, like a treat puzzle or a yak milk chew, and leave them on a training mat or a spot they feel comfortable in. It can help to also put on a calming episode of DOGTV, which is designed with specific sights and sounds that relax your dog.

If your dog leaves their spot to come and find you, don't reward them with attention. Bring them back to their activity. You want their mat or spot to become their safe space.

Another option is to use a crate with discretion. Why discretion? Your dog's crate should be their haven and their safe place. Never punish your dog by sending them to their crate.

You can start crate training your dog by making it very comfortable and putting blankets and toys in there. Then place treats inside. Make sure to leave the door open. Your dog should feel free to come and go as they please.

Some dogs prefer a covered crate, and this can help with their anxiety. Others prefer to see out. Experiment with your dog to discover which option they prefer.

Over time, they will come to see their crate as their own den, where they feel safe.

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# Reduce Boredom

In dogs, boredom can lead to anxiety. If their minds and bodies aren't stimulated, that pent-up energy can go rogue and convert to anxiety.

Gina has a "leaving" routine with her dogs. Each morning she gets up two hours early so she can spend time with them. She tires them out by playing with them, teaching them new tricks, and giving them special treats.

By the time she's ready to leave, they're relaxed and settled into their spots.

Physical exercise isn't the only thing that can tire out your dog. Providing them with lots of mentally stimulating activity can also exhaust them.

There are many puzzle toys that reward dogs with a findable treat. They use their noses and paws to discover where treats are hidden. Zuzu, mentioned earlier, will spend a solid 20 minutes searching for her treats, followed by a nap!

Tulip, below, has a puzzle mat that rewards her when she uncovers treats hidden away in pockets. When dogs use their noses like this to "hunt" for their food, it provides mental stimulation that reduces anxiety.



PICTURED: TULIP WITH HER SNUFFLE MAT

Of course, there is no puzzle toy that will keep your dog occupied all day long while you're away. However, DOGTV is also designed to keep your dog engaged, and you can keep that on all day long.

This is a veterinary-backed, scientific way to enrich your dog and keep separation anxiety in check. There are three segments that are each specifically designed with your dog in mind.



**Stimulation:** These programs feature animation, dogs, fun sounds, and bright colors to keep your dog's brain stimulated.

**Relaxation:** This segment focuses on keeping your dog calm with soothing music and peaceful scenes.

**Exposure:** This segment helps your dog become accustomed to noises that might otherwise trigger them, like doorbells or construction noises. It uses limited exposure techniques that don't stress your dog but help them become comfortable with noises that they don't typically like or aren't used to hearing.



PICTURED: ZUZU

## A Great Working-From-Home Dog-Mom Solution

Zuzu's dog mom, Pamela, works from home and says her dog always seems to bark non-stop as soon as she's in a meeting.

Now, she puts DOGTV on, and Zuzu is quiet and happy!



**DOGTV**

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# Reward Calm Behavior

If your dog is overly excited or anxious, it's not the time to reward them with a treat.

Rather, take some planned quiet time to reinforce calm behavior. One way to do this is by spending calm, quiet time with your dog on a mat. When your dog is calm, give them a training treat.



While you're doing your mat work together, turn on calming or engaging sounds. DOGTV has specific programs that are designed to relax or engage your dog. The colors and scenes are created specifically for dogs.

Help them to associate time on their mat with calmness, and make sure their mat is available when you're not home.

Consistency is key here. Try to spend at least a few minutes of mat time every day with your dog.

# Kiss the Drama Goodbye

If you make a big deal about your departure, your dog will too!

As mentioned before, your dog probably recognizes the cues that you're leaving. Start practicing those cues as "no big deal" events little by little.

For example, pick up your car keys and then go about your business around the house. Teach your dog that this part of the routine is no big deal. Once your dog is no longer reactive to your signs of leaving, go ahead and reward them with a treat.



**It's important for your dog to view your leaving the house as their quiet time when they can just "dog."**

Gina has successfully followed this method for years. She says, "As I walk out the door, I try not to project anxiousness, nervousness, or sadness and have a positive/calm assertive attitude."

Leaving them alone, whether on their mat or in the house, needs to be gradual. Gina started leaving her dogs home alone for just one hour at a time, but only after playing together for a couple of hours.

Putting on DOGTV while you're gone can also help your dog to feel engaged and not threatened by being home alone.

Under-stimulation can be a big cause of anxiety, so making sure your dog has engaging sights and sounds while you're away can help your dog feel at ease.



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# Seek Help

Despite your best and consistent efforts, your dog may still show signs of separation anxiety.

Remember Buck, mentioned in the opening letter? After consulting Veterinary Behaviorist Lisa Radosta, things got better. Buck's level of anxiety was manageable using behavior modification and the prescription medication fluoxetine.

At that point, Buck could finally find peace when he was home alone.

**Despite your best efforts to DIY your dog's separation anxiety at home, the bottom line is you may need to call in the experts. In fact, it's better to reach out early, since separation anxiety that is mild will progress and may become severe.**

At that point, medication may be required. The takeaway? Get your dog help early!



# *The Final Woof*

You can successfully manage your dog's separation anxiety!

Follow this checklist to make your leaving the house "no big deal" to your dog.

**Visit your veterinarian to address any medical issues that cause your dog's symptoms (age-related cognitive decline, noise anxiety, etc.).**

**Project calm positivity when you leave and when you come home.**

**Have daily quiet time and reward your dog when they're calm.**

**Get your dog used to your "leaving" cues.**

**Give your dog vigorous exercise right before you leave (some breeds may need more exercise time than others).**

**Provide them with calming enrichment activities, like DOGTV's relaxation series, puzzle toys, and engagement activities.**

**Encourage your dog to have "alone time" even when you're at home.**

**Visit [dacvb.org](https://dacvb.org) to find a veterinary behaviorist near you and receive a customized treatment plan.**

**Ask your veterinarian about medication if your dog's anxiety is extreme.**

  
**PET LIVING**  
WITH  
*Kristen Levine*



## SOURCES:

\* ACCORDING TO A 2022 STUDY CONDUCTED BY KANTAR, ON BEHALF ON CEVA ANIMAL HEALTH, AS RECORDED ON [DOGANXIETYAWARENESSMONTH.COM](https://www.dogxietyawarenessmonth.com)

† "EXPERT ADVICE ON DOG SEPARATION ANXIETY," VIDEO INTERVIEW WITH KRISTEN LEVINE AND DR. LISA RADOSTA