



Understanding separation related anxiety

Brought to you by Great Dane Rescue & Re-homing NSW

The program mentioned within this info sheet is a program used by Great Dane Rescue & Re-homing NSW with a 100% success rate. If your dog does not respond to this program within after 2 weeks and you can honestly say that you have given the program 100% dedication and consistency we recommend you find a Vet Behaviourist in your area to find a solution that works for your dog as there may be more going on than meets the eye.

There are different analogies that we can use to help people understand what separation anxiety is, here are 2 of classic examples.

Example 1

Separation Anxiety can develop when the Leadership in the home isn't what it needs to be for that particular dog.

Example 2

Separation Anxiety can also occur when a dog has an expectation of another dog/s or people to be present for example if a dog is used to living with another dog and it is re-homed as the only dog it may develop separation anxiety as a result.

This is also relevant to multi dog households when a dog is separated from one/s it lives with to go to the Vets or to go for a walk etc. The family needs to ensure they are giving the dogs time on their own everyday so they learn emotional independence.

Separation Anxiety can occur with families who are home a lot and the dog is used to people always being there.

In these cases it is important for those who are home a lot put the dog outside everyday for short / long periods so they do not become reliant on someone always being there.

Separation Anxiety stemming from a dogs mis-understanding of the family structure is one of the more common reasons for separation related anxiety

Many dogs can survive just fine with your typical human (Guardian) leader being somewhat inconsistent on a daily basis however there are also dogs on the other end of the scale that need for you to show them you're the leader every minute of the day.

Having to be a Leader for every moment of the day can be very challenging for some people which is very understandable as when we bring a dog into our lives we don't expect to have to have a battle for Leadership.

Guardians shouldn't feel insecure that they aren't being a great Leader as it is not something that comes naturally to everyone, it is a born trait and therefore it is something some of us need to learn to develop more-so than others.

A different species

We need to be the Leader of a whole different species so that is another challenge as we need to learn how to communicate with that species and not force our own form of communication and social etiquette onto them as.

Dogs communicate and interact differently to humans and this where misunderstandings of the family unit (pack) can occur.

The Pack vs Family unit

It was once thought that there was an Alpha Wolf per pack and all the Wolves below this Wolf would bow down before it. The Wolf Expert who stated this back in the 1970's has now said he was wrong and mis-interpreted what he saw.

Today, it is accepted by many Wolf experts that the pack is a family unit similar to ours i.e. Parents (Guardians) and children below them. Naturally the parents will rule the roost and the children will follow the directive of their parents (as a generalised statement).

And therefore we need to take the focus away from the Dominance theory that our dogs are constantly seeking our Alpha position because they are not. If the Leader (Guardian) is doing a sufficient job then the family unit will follow its lead.

Dogs instinctually have to have a Leader and therefore if the human is not providing that then the dog instinctually has to step into those shoes because that is the natural order of the canine world.

Similar to how we vote on whom we want the new Prime Minister to be. If we don't feel the current PM is doing a good enough job as our Leader we will elect a new one when the opportunity arises.

Leadership behaviours become a habit

Once we are given the knowledge on how to act as a good trustworthy Leader it becomes a person's default behaviour to act like that with their dog, but to start with it can be really hard and many give up and can't follow through with the program.

What does the program need?

- Your trust that this is a widely used program with great success rates that does not require you to be heavy handed or verbally abusive to the animal.
- Your time. It is labour intensive but it pays off in the end.
- For you to put your emotions to the side to allow you to see a different perspective.
- Consistency. A Leader is consistent. A dog can spot inconsistency and tests inconsistency regularly just like children do to see what they can get away with.

When a person understands where the anxiety is coming from it can help them develop better habits themselves.

For instance if you acknowledge that all your free attention to your dog is contributing it to become emotionally unbalanced you can give yourself a good reason to stop yourself from doing it and follow NILIF principals instead which your dog naturally understands.

First Analogy: Losing your charge...

Imagine this scenario: You're a Mum/Dad of a 3 year old Toddler and one day your toddler runs out the door and down the street and out of sight and for some reason you cannot leave the house and recover your child. You can't see them; you don't know what has happened to them, if they are safe etc.

How do you react to this situation? Perhaps you may:

- 1) Become Frantic.
- 2) Try and find an escape route.
- 3) Emotionally break down.

Depending on your own personality/characteristics will depend how you will continue to handle this situation for the remainder of the day, you may be absolutely frantic for the rest of the day, you may try absolutely everything you can think of to break out of the house or you may end up sobbing and not being able to get your head straight.

The outcomes of this scenario can be seen in dogs that have been unintentionally placed in Leadership roles within their family units.

Many dogs are not Leadership material and are thrust into that role because the human who should be the Leader isn't acting like a Leader (the type of Leader that dogs needs) and in the Canine world there must be a Leader so the dog will fill that void because that is what instinct tells the dog to do.

If you're not Leadership material and are put into this situation you're going to be an ineffective leader, you may stress out more than is necessary, you may not be able to tell the difference between threats and just normal occurrences so you may become more reactive to situations and changes to your environment.

A common problem with dogs in Leadership roles is they over react i.e. they become constant barkers, barking at any little sound. They may become aggressive to people or dogs who they perceive as a threat to their family unit.

Side note: Some dogs that are aggressive towards other dogs become that way because they do not trust their owner to protect them i.e. they do not see the human as the Leader and therefore have to take on the protective role themselves and then end up handling situations unfavourably .

If the dog believes it is the Leader, when you leave the house it is going to get upset by what is occurring because when a dog is the Leader it is their job to take care of you, protect you, know where you are - just as you would take care of a child if you were a parent.

Second Analogy: You're the Leader of the Army...

Imagine this scenario: You get a knock on the door, it's the Prime Minister, and they tell you that we are going to war with ABC Country and they need you to head up the troops. You'll need to give them direction and make sure nothing happens to them!

How do you react to this news?

You may feel pretty stressed about this considering you haven't had to lead troops before and it is a war so harm is going to come to them somewhere along the lines but the Prime Minister is counting on you!

This could go 2 ways: it could go great because you are a natural born Leader! Or, this could go very bad and you could get all your troops killed because you're not really Leadership material and stress is going to mess with how you deal with challenges/threats

In closing...

These two scenarios are designed to help people understand why dogs can get separation anxiety and why Leadership shouldn't be thrust upon many dogs as many are not Leadership material therefore they can end up doing a bad job of it.

The human equivalent could be referred to an emotional breakdown when the human can't perform well, can't control the many aspects they feel they need to and stress ultimately takes over.

The next part

Once you understand the reason behind a dog having separation anxiety you will hopefully then be able to pop your emotions to the side because the process can be emotionally hard on us humans at the start because we are emotional creatures.

Step 1

Do a pretend leave so you know how much anxiety the dog is carrying. Dogs are smart so you can't just walk out the door and hide around the corner, you'll need help from your partner or friend because they'll need to get in the car and drive off down the road and stay there for 5-10 minutes whilst you stay hidden outside your house listening to what is going on and peaking if possible.

If your dog gets upset you can't let the dog know you're there, the only time you would interrupt the pretend leave is if the dog is endangering itself.

You want to take note of what the dog is doing i.e.

- 1) Basic crying/whining
- 2) Howling
- 3) Scratching at the dog
- 4) Standing at the door/window looking for you
- 5) Running through the house/yard
- 6) Trying to escape
- 7) Being destructive
- 8) Barking

Depending on what your neighbours are like you may want to tell them what you're doing so they don't complain or make a fuss.

Note how long the dog continues these behaviours for and if the behaviours lessen over the course of 10 minutes.

The point of this is also to relieve some stress from you as well that you could be passing onto the dog because as humans we can sometimes presume the worst in these situations i.e. the dog is going to escape and get hit by a car or the dog is going to get so frantic it will hurt itself, so you need to know what your dog will do when you leave your house.

You may actually be surprised that the dog isn't being frantic and trying to escape but it is clearly stressed.

The first pretend leave acts as a base level; through the program you will do other short pretend leaves and a couple of extended pretend leaves to monitor the progress.

On return to your home, you will enter the home and ignore the dog until it is calm. Let the dog in if the dog isn't in the house already, you will do all of this without eye contact, without physical touch and without verbalising to the dog - effectively you are pretending the dog does not exist for the next 15 minutes.

The dog may try all sorts of things to get your attention; it will most likely be in a high state of arousal because it is so excited to see you.

Side note: Dogs can be happy to see you but excitement shows anxiety so if your dog loses the plot when you get home don't be flattered, your dog is actually showing you anxiety which arises from Leadership mis-understandings.

i.e. remember when I went through the scenario of the Toddler leaving the house, well this would be the Mothers reaction when the child came back).

In addition you need to do this program with all your dogs not just the ones who obviously have issues, because you are re-asserting yourself as a Leader to the whole pack.

After 15 minutes, call each dog to you individually by name and give a calm pat on the head to the dog you called, if other dogs push to see you ignore them. After the calm pat on the head go on with your day applying NILIF principals.

If the dog you called to you did not immediately come to you, ignore that dog for 24 hours (no eye contact, no nothing, you put food and water down and that is it, do not walk the dog) and then repeat the above process.

The dog ignoring you is a very clear indicator that the dog doesn't see you as a Leader. That dog may sit, drop etc. but does not come when called; this is one of those clear indicators that Obedience is different to respecting the Leader.

Side note: Humans will always have challenges with Leadership and will always have to be working on re-asserting themselves as Leaders because we're not dogs and we only understand about 40% of their behaviour and they obviously understand we're not dogs and don't understand it all and that we struggle with consistency.....just like children they will zoom in on your weakness and exploit it to their benefit.

Step 2

During your day to day contact you need to ensure that you are treating the dogs like sub-ordinates.

In the wild the followers in the pack will fawn over the Leader. For example giving a dog affection when it hasn't done anything to warrant it, you are fawning over the dog and therefore it may be confused about where it stands in your family unit.

If you aren't already following the NILIF (Nothing in life is free) program 100% it's time to start that because without this program you will most likely struggle if you're not a natural Leader and you will find that you may need to become physical with your dog to have it do what you want rather than the dog doing what you want because you are the Leader.

What is a Leader?

A Leader is fair; consistent, assertive (not abusive) and confident. Remember the key word 'fair'.

Here are some things to consider:

- 1) Don't allow the dogs on the human furniture.....they can come up on the furniture in the future when given permission but not yet.
- 2) Don't think you can change the pack order between the dogs in your home by feeding certain dogs first and giving them attention first.

Dogs change their pack order so many times through the day depending on the value those individual dogs hold for certain things.

For example, a dog that appears to be higher on the ladder than another dog can give in and give up a toy or bone to a lesser member simply because they do not value it as highly as the other dog.

It can actually cause more tension by trying to change the pack status between individual dogs. If you want to encourage good calm behaviour between your dogs in your home, feed or give attention to the dog first that is showing the calmest behaviour etc.

- 3) Keep your hands to yourself; it's a really hard thing to do! No free pats. This doesn't mean you should give your dog any less attention, however the dog must do something for that pat.

If your dog asks for attention, ignore the dog and then once it gives up and goes away call the dog to you, ask the dog for a behaviour i.e. a sit and then give attention, don't go overboard though and don't let the dog try and force you into continuing the attention after you said enough (by simply stopping and turning your head away).

Dogs are smart, the dog will soon figure out that he/she must sit to get attention so what the dog will start to do is come to you and sit, don't touch the dog if it does this because it's actually demanding attention. Once your dog starts to predict what behaviour you want start upping the behaviour i.e. ask for a drop. You may need to teach the dog some new behaviours such as high 5's etc. Trick training is a great way to bond with your dog.

- 4) Follow through on what you say, make sure you have a collar on the dog in house so you can make sure the dog follows through on requested behaviours i.e. If you tell your dog to go to his bed (and the dog actually understands this request) but instead he walks away from you, go to them and calmly take the collar in your hand and take them to the bed.

If they get up and move away, go and get them and put them back. This is where consistency comes in as well. You may need to do this 20-100 times if the dog is testing your consistency and you need to do it without emotion.

If after the dog stays on their bed and I'm happy for them to move I will give them a release command or call them to me.

- 5) If your dog becomes reactive when someone comes to the door thank them. It sounds like a strange thing to do however pack members will alert the Leader to potential danger.

Next time your dog barks at something thank them and go and look, be obvious to the dog that you're checking it out.

If the dog does not cease the alert behaviour then you need to take control. For example if you are at your front door you need to claim the front door by raising your chin and walking towards the dogs with an assertive energy, you may say something like "Back" in an assertive tone.

It is a good idea to practice this when no one is there so they dogs become used to what your new body movements mean especially when you are opening the front door. You can direct them to a bed if there is one close by.

- 6) Dogs pushing past you is something you'll want to address as well, this one is easily addressed by hip/thigh knocking the dog out of the way. Dogs do this to each other by shoulder or hip knocking each other.

The strength you put into the barge is relevant to the strength in which the dog puts into knocking/barging you.

- 7) Dinner time needs to be a calm affair, so if your dogs lose the plot at dinner time do not pick up the bowls until you have calmness, if they lose the plot as soon as you pick up the bowls you simply put them down on the bench again and you repeat this process until you get what you want.

Dogs are smart and they'll click to this pretty fast. Ask for a behaviour before the dog eats, a 5 second stay is a good one (but you'll need to teach this to the dog first if they do not already know it) and then give your release word such as "Ok" or "Break". It's best not to use "Ok" where possible as it's such a commonly used word.

- 8) No free treats. If you want to give your dog a treat make them work for it, ask them to do say 3 behaviours. Then offer the treat to them which they need to take calmly, pull the treat away if they dog isn't approaching it in a calm way and repeat the process until the dog gets the message.

- 9) Invading your personal space is a classic behaviour dogs will do to get the things they want, you'll often see dogs do this to each other do they can claim a bed a toy, a treat etc.

As a Leader demand your personal space, if a dog plonks down on your feet, stand up and nudge the dog away. If you like dogs near you for cuddles that is fine but invite the dog into your space first and as soon as the dog displays behaviours that aren't calm and well behaved such as pawing and swinging their head around get the dog to move away from you.

- 10) Stop having conversations with your dog that they don't understand. We all talk to our dogs and the dogs will sit there and pull out the keywords they know but if you are having challenges with your dog not listening to you try and minimise talking to your dog so that when you do talk they listen and just say what you want not a whole conversation about how much you love them etc.

A number of dogs switch off if they are talked to too much so this is something that you may like to consider.

Dogs are silent communicators as it is, they talk to each other with body language and if you can learn more about canine body language and use it in your home you would be on a great new path to communicating with your dog.

- 11) Challenge yourself to a no-talk day every now and then and in this day you have to use your body language and energy to get what you need from your dog, you'll learn a-lot and you'll see your dog be a bit more relaxed as you're communicating with it in the way it communicates.
- 12) Always set the dog up for success and never failure i.e. if you have a young dog that harasses an older dog then you're not going to let the young dog have free reign around the older dog, you're going to have the younger dog on a lead so you can correct its behaviour right then and there and minimise any harassment to the older dog.
- 13) Put the toys away. As the Leader you are the one who says when it's play time so pop the toys away where the dogs can't get to them and then each day you can offer play time with the dogs with their toys and at the end of this play time you put the toys away.

This can create a dog who is more interested in toys than a dog that has 100 toys laying around everywhere, it also helps dogs who guard toys around other dogs.

If a dog ever gets a bit too carried away in play with you, stand up, say nothing and walk away and ignore the dog for 15 minutes.

Step 3

From now on when you leave the house, you'll ignore the dog (no eye contact, no nothing) for 15 minutes before you leave.

Remove any triggers for anxiety based behaviours i.e. if you only turn the radio on when you leave don't do that anymore.

If you give the dog a treat when you leave, don't do that anymore.

If the you can exit out of a different door than the one you normally do then do that, this is about re-conditioning the dog because right now it has been conditioned to automatically respond in a certain way when certain triggers are presented so even if you get your Leadership back on track you may still need to remove the conditioned triggers.

All of the above points to consider do become normal behaviours for dog owners over time but they are hard to start with and sometimes even hard to follow in the future, but if you don't apply NILIF then you're not going to get very far.

And the last step – the Separation Training Program

The next step is to re-condition the dog, in brief this means you're going to work with the dog so the dog will react in a different way than it previously did to a specific stimuli.

The key here is repetition, repetition, repetition & a fair whack of patience!

Step 1

Get up without saying anything and don't look at the dog, walk out the door and shut the door behind you (make sure you have your keys).

Stay outside out of sight for about 30 seconds and then walk back inside and sit down again as if nothing happened and ignore the dog.

If 30 seconds is too much for the dog to cope with (the dog can be stressed but not freaking out completely) you can start by just going outside, closing the door and then coming straight back in and then extending time slowly. Most dogs can cope with 30 seconds without tearing the house to pieces.

Step 2

As soon as the dog lies down and puts its head down you repeat Step 1. This time stay outside for 1 minute.

Step 3

Repeat Step 2 again and again and again until the dog no longer fusses when you get up and leave the house.

Recommended time is 1 hour training sessions per day for 2 weeks.

Dogs who aren't natural born leaders and who don't want to be leaders will give up within the hour session, many Owners report that the dogs don't even bother standing up when they leave the house at the end of that hour.

The re-conditioning is showing the dog as the Leader you come and go as you please. In the wild when a Leader Canine returns to its pack it acts aloof.....like the pretty girl walking into the ball room. Aloof in Human v Canine terms is 'Ignoring'.

The Leader Canine does this because each time it returns it has to re-assert itself as a Leader to let the pack know that nothing has changed.

It is recommended you act aloof anytime returning through a closed door, that closed door includes a bathroom door.

The Leave and Return on a daily long term basis:

The Leave and Return program is really important, it's emotionally hard to start with as well so you have to prepared yourself.

Leaving the house: Ignore the dog as though it doesn't exist 15 minutes prior to you leaving the house, be mindful of any previous triggers you used i.e. turning the radio on, giving a treat etc.

When it's time to leave the house, remember your posture, remember to breath (often people concerned hold their breath), get your things and simply walk out (if you leave the dogs in the house).

If you put your dogs outside, do this 15 minutes before you leave. You may need to advise your neighbours of what you're doing so they'll not get too upset with you when the dog barks and whines in protest.

Returning to the house:

Remember your posture; remember to breath, no eye contact, no touch, no verbal. Walk in and ignore the dogs, be prepared for the dogs to do a number of different things to get your attention, ignore them all, the ignore needs to last for at least 15 minutes.

If you have the dogs outside, ignore the dogs until they calm down then let them inside and ignore them.

After 15 minutes, you call the dog to you by name and only give attention to the dog you called. Give a calm pat on the head and them go about your day and follow the NILIF program.

If the dog does not immediately come to you when you call them (don't make excuses for the dog) ignore that dog for 24 hours and then repeat the above process.

For the most challenging dogs there have been cases where they have refused to come for everyday for a whole month...that's a lot of ignoring but the most challenging dog is going to make you prove that you're a suitable Leader.

Please continue to the next back for products to help during behavioural modification training.



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Approx \$45.00 for 1 collar that lasts approx 30 days.

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Use to modify behaviour in dogs. Has a calming effect by releasing dog pheromones into the air via a 240v plug in diffuser. Lasts for approximately 30 days if left on 24 hours a day.

Independent observations from a Behaviourist has suggested that DAP may not be a suitable solution if the dog did not have a good start to life i.e. when it was still feeding from its Mother getting the natural pheromones.

Approx \$80.00 for diffuser and D.A.P. Refills are approx. \$40.00. www.k9pro.com.au