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How to Manage Dogs with Separation Anxiety

CHICAGO, IL: As much as some may want to, humans can't be with their dogs all day, every day. At some point, the dog gets left alone. If they are not taught how to be unaccompanied, this can have serious consequences. Previously housebroken dogs have accidents after their owner leaves, they scratch at exit points or at their crate so intensely that they damage the door or their own paws, and of course, they bark.

These dogs are experiencing separation anxiety. It does not have to be a permanent condition, but it can be challenging to deal with if training is not done properly.

"I've had two clients who have jumped out of windows and that's absolutely separation anxiety," says Jeff Millman, owner of a private dog training business in the Chicago area called Chicago Paws. He defines separation anxiety as a "panic attack" whenever the dog is left alone. The dog only needs to exhibit a few symptoms to be diagnosed. The biggest indication is how quickly the symptoms occur after the owner leaves.

The solution to this problem can be time consuming but dog owners, rest assured that it is not necessary to stay home with your dog all the time. Millman advises owners to begin with short departures – even just a second at a time – slowly increasing the amount as the dog becomes less anxious. When returning, give the dog a treat, but do not give the treat unless the dog shows no signs of anxiety.

A way to prevent separation anxiety is to crate a dog or puppy to teach them how to be alone. "A lot of people only use the crate when they leave or at night, but they should use it periodically when they're home," Millman says. Owners can leave the dog crated while they watch TV for a half hour, and then let the dog out and reward her for being calm in the crate. If the dog barks, scratches, or whines, the behavior should be ignored.

A similar process should be used when leaving the house. Do not leave the dog alone for an amount of time they can't handle. According to Millman, dogs can have regressions if their owner pushes too quickly.

"Don't say goodbye and don't say hello," advises Millman. It may sound cruel but it's important to keep coming and going casual. If the owner makes leaving a big deal, the dog will pick up on that and possibly turn that into anxiety.

Keep in mind, just because a dog barks does not mean it has separation anxiety. "People diagnose it a lot more frequently than it actually presents...it's not as common as other things that I deal with but in my opinion it's the most challenging dog topic," said Millman.

SOURCE:

Jeff Millman

www.chicagopaws.com