

Adopting out Dogs with Separation Anxiety: Adoption Counseling Best Practices



Planning Tip: Plan ahead for how you want to approach these conversations and what resources you will share. *Remember, this is a quality of life issue for the dog and the potential guardians.* Adoption counseling sessions need to balance giving the potential adopters the information they need to make an informed decision **and** offer a sense of hope – separation anxiety IS treatable!



Talking Points: While counseling sessions will vary in many ways, we do recommend talking through the following four key topics with any guardian interested in welcoming home a dog with separation anxiety. The bullet points under each of those four are simply suggestions for some detail to consider including in case helpful to have.

1. Talk openly and honestly about separation anxiety:

- Separation anxiety is a debilitating panic issue, a fear of being home alone.
- We know a lot about what does not cause separation anxiety; yet, we know very little about what does. There are studies to suggest that genetics likely play a role, so don't believe the myth that only dogs from shelters and rescues are afflicted.
- Like any dog with special care needs, such as diabetes, hind-end paralysis, or a history of seizures, dogs with separation anxiety come with a few of their own.
- Separation anxiety **is** treatable; dogs afflicted with this condition can, and do with the help of training, learn alone time can feel safe.

2. Training takes time:

- Separation anxiety is treatable; however, training takes time. Every dog's journey is unique, though it can be helpful to think in terms of months, not weeks or days, and months, not years. It's **neither** a quick fix, **nor** the rest of your lives together.
- "Systematic desensitization" is the most efficient and effective training approach to help dogs overcome their separation anxiety. It involves beginning with a period of non-stressful alone time for the dog, which may be quite short, and then gradually and systematically increasing that time as they learn alone time can feel safe.
- **If the dog is on behavior medication**, discuss a plan for continued support from a veterinarian/veterinary behaviorist for the dog's medication needs.
- **If the dog is not on behavior medication**, share that research supports the use of behavior medication in conjunction with behavior modification, as an effective strategy for treating separation anxiety, and encourage them to consult with their veterinarian to see if their dog may benefit from anti-anxiety medications.

3. Managing absences is critical:

- One requirement of helping a dog with separation anxiety is not exposing them to any terrifying alone time, whether managing the issue or working a training protocol. *Remember, this is a welfare issue for the dog.*
- This is **temporary** only until the dog can be successfully left alone.
- It does not need to be the potential adopter(s) that is always with the dog. Friends, family, pet sitters, and other creative management options will do.

4. Post-adoption support:

- Remind potential adopters they are not, nor will they be, alone.
- Share the types of post-adoption support and follow-up you offer, both to all adopters and, if applicable, specific to adopting a dog with separation anxiety.



Resources for Adopters: Here are a few to consider sharing with interested adopters before, during, or after the adoption counseling session to help them better understand what it means to care for a dog with separation anxiety and how to best set everyone (and dog) up for success. We've grouped them by topic.

- **Topic: Learning more about what separation anxiety is (and isn't):**
 - PDF: [Understanding Separation Anxiety](#)
 - PDF: [Treating Separation Anxiety Myths](#)
 - PDF: [How to Help a Dog Overcome Separation Anxiety](#)
 - Blog: [FAQs Unpacked: Providing Answers and Dispelling Myths](#)
 - Blog: [The Separation Anxiety Top 10 List](#)
- **Topic: Managing absences...**
 - Blog: [Crowdsourcing Alone-Time Alternatives](#)
 - Blog: [It Takes a Village](#)
- **Topic: Separation anxiety is treatable...**
 - Blog: [A Success Story in the Making](#)
 - Blog: [The History of a Dog Who Overcame Separation Anxiety](#)
- **Topic: Getting started with training...**
 - Blog: [Promissory Note and Practical Practices for Pet Parents](#)
 - Blog: [Getting the Right Information First](#)
 - Blog: [Unleashing New Hope! Introducing Mission POSSIBLE 2.0](#)
 - Self-paced online course: [Mission POSSIBLE](#)
 - This course takes guardians step-by-step through how to design and implement a successful training protocol to help their dog overcome separation anxiety.
 - **Note:** We offer Mission POSSIBLE discounts to shelters and rescues wishing to offer this course to adopters. Please reach out to us using this form if you'd like us to set one up for you: [Contact Form](#).