

## For Pet's Sake

### New approaches to treating canine separation anxiety

While destructive behaviour can sometimes be a normal outlet for dogs, some destructive behaviours may be due to underlying anxiety. For example, when destruction is directed at doorways, windows, and exit points, rather than garbage cans, food cupboards, or a pair of leather shoes, further assessment is needed to confirm whether this may be due to separation anxiety.

A diagnosis of separation anxiety typically includes one or more of these symptoms: destructiveness, distress vocalization, house-soiling or other signs of anxiety such as salivation. Signs usually arise immediately following the owner's departure. If any of these behaviours are seen when family members are present, other causes should be considered. Evidence of destructive behaviours or house soiling should be easy to identify when family members return home, but vocalization ranging from whining to howling may often go undetected except when severe enough to disturb neighbours. Video monitoring is useful to verify the diagnosis as well as to monitor the efficacy of a treatment program. Dogs with separation anxiety often have hyper attachment and begin to show anxiety as the owner prepares to leave.

Dogs suffering from separation anxiety are panicked, fearful, and traumatized when left alone. Successful resolution of separation anxiety usually requires a combination of behavioural management and medication. The behaviour program should focus on teaching the dog acceptable and alternative behaviours in which to engage when alone. Provided the dog's daily needs are adequately met, training should focus on encouraging the dog to find a safe retreat to rest or play with its favourite toys, so it can learn to settle and occupy itself away from the owners. During these sessions, attention seeking behaviour must be ignored, while settled behaviours should gradually be increased and positively reinforced. Some dogs may be less anxious when crated or confined as they find some comfort from this routine; others are more panicked. Since pre-departure anxiety is often associated with the handling of keys, mobile phones or shoes, desensitization and counter-conditioning can be as simple as picking up keys or a briefcase, giving a favoured treat or toy, and setting them back down without leaving. Repetition teaches the dog that departure cues may be pleasant and not always associated with actual departures. Family members should practice non-emotional departures and greetings. Punishment never alleviates anxiety and has no place in the treatment of separation anxiety.

At actual departure times, food puzzle toys, chews and favoured treats can be provided to distract and occupy the dog. However, in the short term it may be necessary to find day care until the behaviour program and medication can be effectively implemented.

Another option in the short term is to give benzodiazepines such as alprazolam prior to departure to reduce anxiety for a few hours.

Since dogs with separation anxiety are highly anxious when left alone, behaviour modification should be combined with drug therapy both for the well-being of the dog and to improve treatment success. Clomipramine (Clomicalm<sup>®</sup>, Novartis Animal Health), is currently licensed for the treatment of separation anxiety and a chewable fluoxetine tablet (Reconcile<sup>®</sup>, Elanco) will be also be available this fall. The primary action of both drugs is to enhance serotonin transmission, but peak effect may not be achieved for three to four weeks. The advantage of using veterinary approved drugs is their proven efficacy, predictable bioavailability, palatability, access to technical support as well as the client education material that you and your staff can use to help guide the owner through the behaviour program. Dog Appeasing Pheromone (DAP<sup>®</sup>, Intervet Schering Plough) has also been shown to be effective alone or in combination with medication.

Often families attribute their dog's misbehaviours when left alone to vengeance or spite. However, dog owners need to understand that the behavioural signs are due to anxiety and distress and that medication can help alleviate their dog's suffering.

Product information and client support is available from [reconcile.com](http://reconcile.com), [dap-pheromone.com](http://dap-pheromone.com), or request client education material from your local industry representative.

This article was co-authored with Drs. Colleen Wilson and Theresa DePorter. Dr. Landsberg is a veterinary behaviourist at the North Toronto Animal Clinic and is a mentor for the specialty training programs of Dr. Theresa DePorter in Detroit ([ovrs.com](http://ovrs.com)), Dr. Colleen Wilson in Ottawa ([osgoodevet.com](http://osgoodevet.com)) and Dr. Sagi Denenberg in Thornhill ([northtorontovets.com](http://northtorontovets.com)). This article was first published in the OVMA's September/October 2010 issue of *Focus* magazine and is reprinted with their permission.



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these stages and a resource base to address each stage will ultimately increase satisfaction, performance, and both individual and practice level results.

An effective HR foundation includes the following tools: a policies and procedures reference, structured evaluation, structured training, coaching, counseling, and either job descriptions or a task summary. Dr. Tait stressed that all of these tools must be active, connected to the practice mission, and connected to each other.

#### Recruitment

Ineffective recruitment can result in an unsuitable staff member or a staff member who has strengths that don't match the employer's needs. Having an effective recruitment strategy is important because there is always a cost

of hiring, a cost of training, and a cost of lost client relationships if it does not work out. It is estimated that it takes approximately 24 leads for every one employee hired. Effective recruitment depends on following an efficient process in the elements of hiring, correctly identifying what type of person and skills you are seeking, and defining the role accurately. According to a 2008 study published in the *Harvard Business Review*, the turnover rate following structured hiring is 5-7% per year, compared to 12-17% for unstructured hiring. Cynthia Wutchiett, CPA, of Wutchiett Tumblin and Associates, estimated that for one \$8/hour employee turnover costs in excess of \$13,000; one \$15/hour employee in excess of \$30,000; and one \$75,000 professional employee in excess of \$100,000. Therefore, it is easy to see why effective recruitment is so important, stressed Dr. Tait. In addition to