

SEPARATION ANXIETY AND ISOLATION DISTRESS

Separation anxiety is a fairly common condition in which a dog shows significant signs of fear/anxiety when they are left at home alone or are physically separated from a loved one. With separation anxiety, the dog is not able to be relaxed and comfortable unless a very specific person is present. This can occur in such a way that the dog is fine being left alone with one or two people, yet no one else. However, more commonly there is one individual in particular that is the main focus for the dog, who appears to feel significant distress when they can't access that person. The term separation anxiety, also known as separation-related distress, has become quite well known and people tend to incorrectly refer to any distress related to a dog being alone as 'separation anxiety'. In reality, separation anxiety/separation-related distress is a clinical disorder that usually requires consultation with a veterinary behaviourist to properly diagnose.



Many dogs reported by their owners as having separation anxiety, in fact are displaying **isolation distress**. This refers to a dog displaying significant signs of fear/anxiety when completely alone, but not when some kind of social support is present. This social support can often be human or canine, although sometimes it does need to be an individual that the greyhound is familiar with.



Why is it important to understand the difference between separation anxiety and isolation distress?

It is often the case that the distress a dog is experiencing when alone is mislabelled, because the term 'separation distress/anxiety' is more commonly known than isolation distress. This presents an issue when approaching how to manage the distress.

For separation anxiety cases it is often best to seek veterinary attention and if possible to appropriately medicate the dog as directed by a veterinarian to improve the dog's emotional state and capacity to learn. If one and only one person is able to keep the dog from being distressed, then these cases are often the most difficult to manage and require a combination of training and medication.

On the other hand when it comes to isolation distress there are multiple ways of mitigating the anxiety and stress that arises; using a neighbour, friend, family member to mind the dog when it would otherwise be alone or even pairing the dog with a canine companion, and implementing behavioural modification techniques to build up the dog's resilience and increase its capacity to cope when alone. As a last resort, the dog can be rehomed to someone whose lifestyle means the dog will rarely be left alone e.g. retirees or casual workers.

It's important to remember that each dog is an individual and separation anxiety or isolation distress will vary from case to case.

Signs of either separation anxiety or isolation distress may include:

- Destruction
- Vocalization (whining, howling or barking)
- Elimination (toileting inside)
- Shadowing or following owner very closely
- Showing anxiety when owner shows signs of imminent departure (e.g. picking up keys)
- Excessive greeting upon owner's return
- Disinterest in eating when alone
- Behavioral signs of depression (such as general sadness, decreased energy, etc.)
- Drooling excessively
- Vomiting/Diarrhea

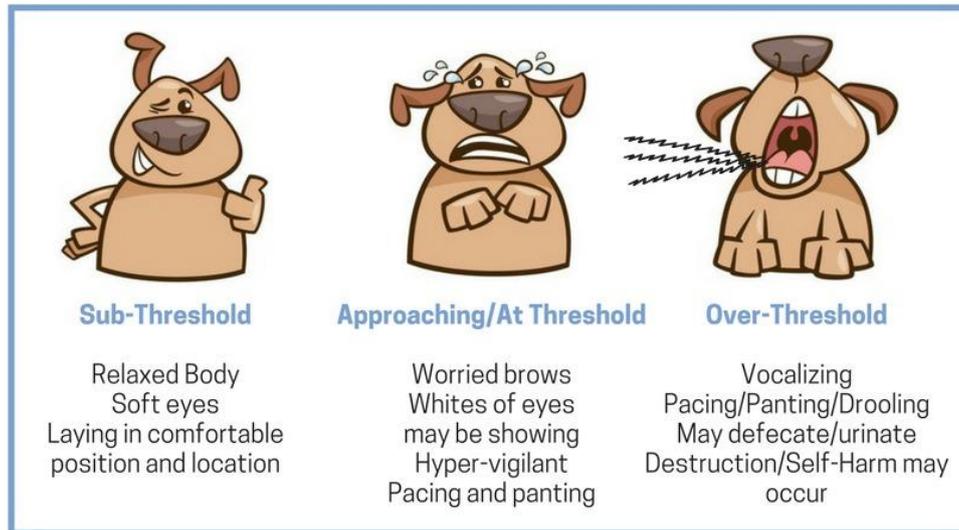
Greyhounds with Separation anxiety

- Dogs suspected to have separation anxiety should be referred to a veterinarian with experience in behaviour for diagnosis and formulation of a treatment plan.
- GAPNSW can provide additional support to you by working in conjunction with the vet and their suggested treatment plans.

Greyhounds with isolation distress

- For dogs displaying mild signs of distress, GAPNSW have several resources to assist adopters with helping these dogs settle into their routine. Such plans can involve:
 - Building emotional resilience (see handout)
 - Behavioural training plans "Missions" (see work by Melina DeMatini)

Working with dogs who are distressed does NOT involve leaving them alone in the hope that the animal learns to 'deal' with it. Rather, behaviour modification and training aims to improve the dog's resilience, provide choice and work at their own pace.



From Malena DeMartini's 2018 Mission Possible course resources

Dogs displaying moderate to severe signs of isolation distress should also be referred to a veterinarian with further training in behaviour for initial examination and diagnosis. GAPNSW can then work in conjunction with the proposed treatment plan.

GAPNSW can develop rehabilitation/management plans based on knowledge of the dog's history in our care and foster care, as well as whilst in their adoptive homes.

Some greyhounds may show isolation distress in some environments, but not others. For example, some dogs may show no signs of distress when living with another dog (with owners that work full-time), but show significant distress if living as a single dog and left alone for any amount of time. As such, it is important that we match dogs to homes that best meet their needs as individuals. Sometimes this information is revealed after the dog has been adopted. In these situations the dog will have a better quality of life in a different type of home. An adopter who finds themselves in such a situation shouldn't feel upset, but should think of it as a positive in that they are now helping that dog find a home to thrive in and that suits them best.

Some adopters may also be willing to help dogs showing isolation distress by adopting a second, more confident greyhound. This can provide constant social support and ease the

burden off the adopter, but may not work for every dog. GAPNSW can provide advice on whether your dog may benefit from canine social support.

