



GREYHOUND

Separation and Anxiety Issues



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What are separation related issues?

Some greyhounds may suffer from separation related issues when left alone and find it hard to cope. Separation related issues can be distressing for both the greyhound and the owner. However with careful training and management they can be prevented or treated. There are a number of reasons why some greyhounds find it hard to cope when by themselves and these include:

- Frustration and/or boredom
- Phobias and fears – such as fear of thunderstorms or fireworks
- Over-attachment to the owner (or family member), resulting in separation anxiety.

Greyhounds and separation issues

In the UK, racing greyhounds are usually kennelled in pairs and have spent their lives surrounded by other greyhounds. Their lives follow a set schedule and a daily kennel routine. This means that some greyhounds may find it difficult to cope with changes in their routine and adjusting to periods when their owner is absent; most greyhounds however, do adjust successfully to their new lives and homes after racing.

What are the signs of a separation related issue?

The signs of separation-related-distress can vary, and depend on the individual greyhound. Some of the more common signs that your greyhound is experiencing separation issues include:

- destructive chewing, digging, ripping or shredding of objects when you are absent
- barking or howling after you have left
- soiling or urinating in the home when left alone
- pacing, whining, panting, trembling as you prepare to leave the home





Preventing separation related distress

If your greyhound is showing signs of separation related issues, the advice in this leaflet aims to help you find a way of helping your greyhound to cope when you are absent, as well as preventing the issue from becoming worse. However, this can be a complex, time consuming problem to resolve and this leaflet can only provide an overview of the condition and basic means to remedy.

Attention seeking behaviour

Often greyhounds that suffer with separation related issues become 'velcro' greyhounds; that is, they never leave your side and follow you from room to room, even to the bathroom. They may pester you for attention by pawing, barking, nudging and leaning on you, or they may always want to be in close physical contact such as lying at your feet.

This attention may appear like affection and is nice for us, however it does not help a greyhound become independent or feel secure and less anxious when left alone. To help prepare your greyhound for the times when he will be left alone, you need to increase his independence and decrease attention seeking behaviours.





Increasing your greyhound's independence

To help build your greyhound's independence and ability to cope when left alone, it is essential that you ignore all of your greyhound's attention seeking behaviour.

This does not mean that you should ignore your greyhound completely and never give them attention; it means that you initiate attention with your greyhound only when they are calm and quiet.

It can also help if you teach your greyhound to lie on a mat or bed which is not right next to you, rather than lying at your feet or next to you. If your greyhound follows you from room to room, a baby gate across doors can prevent this, whilst ensuring that your greyhound can still see you.

For some greyhounds confinement to a crate, also known as an indoor kennel, can help with separation issues, but only in cases where the greyhound has been trained to enjoy time alone in the crate. Many greyhounds will injure themselves trying to escape from a crate if they have not been trained to accept their crate as a safe place to relax. For details about training your greyhound to accept a crate, please see our **Crate Training** leaflet.

You may also find that using an Adaptil plug-in, collar or spray may help reduce your greyhound's anxiety. Adaptil is a synthetic copy of the appeasing pheromone that bitches secrete when they are nursing their puppies.

You could also consider the Pet Remedy range of plug in diffusers, calming wipes, shampoos and sprays, a naturally calming effect and can help to reduce anxiety in greyhounds.

Always consult your vet before using any products.



Helpful Tip:

The Greyhound Trust Store
www.greyhoundtruststore.com
carry many of these
products which may help
with separation
anxiety

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Calm departures and greetings

Keeping your departures and returns home quiet and calm can help prevent separation related issues for your greyhound. If you make a big fuss of your greyhound when you leave the house and again when you come home, you are creating a big contrast to your presence in the house and to being absent. This contrast makes it harder for your greyhound to cope when you are not there and can lead to the greyhound anticipating your return and becoming over excited.

In the 10-15 minutes before you leave, it is best to keep your departure low key. It is also essential that your return is kept calm too. These calm departures and returns will help your greyhound to cope better with your absence.

Dealing with destructive behaviour

If your greyhound has destructive behaviour such as chewing door frames, digging up flooring, or ripping and shredding objects whilst you are absent, it may be that your greyhound is frustrated or bored by your absence. To help avoid this destructive behaviour it can be useful to provide your greyhound with something to do in your absence.

If your greyhound is destructive or barks in your absence, providing a chew toy such as a stuffed Kong or feeding your greyhound using an activity feeder can help occupy them. You will need to find out what food your greyhound likes best and which will keep your greyhound busy trying to get it out of the stuffed chew toy. For most greyhounds, the smellier the food, the better! Foods like meat paste, peanut butter, cheese spread or pieces of liver sausage tend to work well. Once your greyhound has the hang of how to get the food out of a chew toy, you can always stuff and then freeze it, which will mean that your greyhound will need to work harder and for longer to get the food out.

If your greyhound destroys items, you can provide a number of items that your greyhound can safely destroy such as cardboard boxes (with any staples removed), the cardboard inside of kitchen roll/toilet roll, or old material.





Dealing with house soiling

If your greyhound soils or urinates in the house whilst you are absent, it may be that your greyhound is not fully house-trained or that you left your greyhound alone for too long with a full bladder.

To avoid house soiling, make sure that you take your greyhound outside, and on a lead, before you leave and encourage them to toilet outside. Once they have toileted, praise them and give them a food treat. If accidents continue to happen, you will need to go back to house-training your greyhound.

It is advised not to tell your greyhound off or punish them if they do have an accident. You may find that using a greyhound crate/indoor kennel helps your greyhound to avoid accidents.

For further details on this, please see our **Crate Training** leaflet.

Dealing with fears and phobias

Sometimes greyhounds can develop fears and phobias, such as a fear of thunderstorms and loud noises, which may trigger destructive behaviour and anxiety in your greyhound when you are absent.

If your greyhound has a known fear or phobia, you will need to help your greyhound overcome this. Your greyhound will not improve just by exposing them repeatedly to their fear or phobia and this may make them worse.

It is advisable that you contact a suitably qualified dog trainer or pet behaviour counsellor who will help you with a training plan to overcome your greyhound's fear.





Dealing with separation anxiety

In cases of full-blown separation anxiety, it is likely that your greyhound will become increasingly anxious as you prepare to leave the house. Greyhounds are very good at picking up the signs that indicate you are about to leave the house. These are called departure cues and can be as simple as picking up your keys and/or bag, putting on your lipstick, or putting on your coat. These cues are what trigger your greyhound's anxiety and tell them you are about to leave.

To help your greyhound cope with your absences, you must desensitise them to your departure cues and then create positive associations with these cues. In time, this will lead your greyhound to associate the departure cues with something good happening, and make them less likely to be anxious when you leave.

To desensitise your greyhound to your departure cues, you should go through the motions of leaving the house several times a day, without actually leaving.





Punishment – why you should not punish your greyhound

Upon your return home, if you find that your greyhound has been destructive, soiled or urinated in the house it is imperative that you do not punish your greyhound by shouting or physical means; your greyhound will not know what they have done wrong. Contrary to popular belief rubbing your greyhound's nose in his faeces or urine, will not teach them that they have done wrong; it will only serve to make them afraid of you.

Greyhounds cannot make the association between events that are separated by a few minutes, so they are unable to make the connection between unwanted behaviour in your absence and your anger upon your return. Your return home is very significant to your greyhound and it only takes a few occasions of physical or verbal punishment to make your greyhound more anxious about your return. This can then lead to a fearful greyhound and the development of other behaviour problems.

What to do if your greyhounds anxiety is not improving

If your greyhound is showing signs of separation issues that are not improving, it is advisable to seek further help from your vet.

Your local veterinary practice may recommend medication to help your greyhound cope, or a consultation with a clinical behaviourist. A clinical behaviourist works on referral and will help you with a practical treatment plan that suits both you and your greyhounds circumstances. It is recommended to use someone who is APBC OR ABTC registered.

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