

A new sound

Mary Chapin Carpenter works her magic with the help of a full orchestra and chorus.



Pets can do wonders to improve our mental health, but it is important to look after their mental health needs as well. Here, Juneau looks longingly at her friends outside. PHOTO SPECIAL TO THE GUARDIAN BY BRETT CURRIE

Dolly, left, and Lady romp together in the snow. Working exercise into your dog's regular schedule can help her settle down when you leave the house. It also helps to beat those winter blues. PHOTO SPECIAL TO THE GUARDIAN BY BRETT CURRIE

Absence makes the heart grow fonder

Separation anxiety is a serious behaviour condition for dogs and dog owners

Coping with separation from loved ones is rarely easy. This is true for humans and our pets.

In veterinary medicine, separation anxiety syndrome is one of the most

common behavioural problems diagnosed in dogs. This condition can be very harmful to a dog's mental health and very taxing —

financially and emotionally — on dog owners. However, by creating a constructive routine for your dog and using helpful resources in your community, canine separation anxiety can be successfully prevented and treated.

Signs of canine separation anxiety are often likened to human panic attacks. These attacks are typically triggered by the sudden departure of a person to whom the dog is very attached and usually occur immediately after the person leaves.

Common signs include

destructive behaviour in the home, inappropriate urination/defecation, excessive whining or howling and self-mutilation. These distressing symptoms can cause severe mental and physical trauma to our pets, as well as significant damage to property and to the relationships we have with our animal companions.

Dogs are social beings; however they typically spend many hours alone during the day. Separation anxiety can develop when a dog cannot cope with being left on its own. Studies have found that some dogs are at a greater risk than others. Common risk factors include being unaccustomed to being left alone,

prolonged and emotional owner departures, changes in the owner's routine and a history of traumatic separation (for example, the death of the owner or being relinquished to an animal shelter).

One study found that dogs in homes with a single owner and spayed/neutered dogs were more likely to develop separation anxiety than dogs in homes with multiple owners and intact dogs, respectively.

There has been no connection found between separation anxiety and the dog's sex, age or "spoiling" activities like sleeping on the bed.

To prevent and treat separation anxiety, it is important to have a reliable, consistent routine for your dog that includes physical, intellectual and social stimulation.

Here are some tips that can help you address separation anxiety:

▶ Teach your dog that it is OK to be alone — start

with brief periods and gradually increase.

▶ Dogs with active separation anxiety should be only left in a crate when they are able to relax in it. Until the dog is comfortable in the crate, leave your dog in a safe room with drawn curtains to reduce sight stimulation.

▶ Give your pup a special chew toy or interactive treat toy as you leave the house. This will help her associate your departure with good things and distract her from being left alone.

▶ A walk in the morning will prepare your dog to rest when you leave for work.

▶ Keep your comings and goings from the house as boring as possible to prevent your dog from becoming hyper-aroused at these times.

▶ Provide regular opportunities for your dog to interact with other humans and dogs to help build her social confidence and

See Absence, D2

AT A GLANCE

Fast facts

Question: What does canine separation anxiety look like?

Answer: It is similar to a human panic attack that is triggered when the dog is left alone. Destructive behaviours are among the most common and distressing symptoms.

Question: What kind of treatment is needed?

Answer: A reliable and stimulating routine for your dog that includes behaviour modification training is often helpful. Veterinarians will sometimes prescribe medication in addition to a behaviour modification plan when necessary.

Helpful websites: Teaching a puppy to be alone: <http://dogtime.com/5-tips-teach-pup-to-be-alone-andrea-arden.html>

Dealing with separation anxiety: <http://drsophiayin.com/blog/entry/separation-anxiety-solution-training-fido-that-calm-behavior-makes-you>



Animal Talk

Mary-Claire Sanderson



This couch was damaged by a dog with separation anxiety. Destructive behaviour is one of the most common and distressing signs. PHOTO SPECIAL TO THE GUARDIAN BY ERIN MULLEN

Happy endings



Lab mix "Artie" was adopted from the P.E.I. Humane Society in August, but it's clear to see he's enjoying his first winter in his new home province of Nova Scotia. Adopters Annette and Bill Burchell report that he "the best dog ever" whatever the time of the year.

PHOTO SPECIAL TO THE GUARDIAN BY ANNETTE AND BILL BURCHELL

PLAY THE SESAME STREET SCRAMBLE



Search The Guardian to find the Sesame Street gang, to find the word of the day for a chance to win.

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HOW TO PLAY TO WIN:

Turn the pages of The Guardian to find the Sesame Street gang. Each will have a letter from the alphabet. Collect all six letters, unscramble them to spell a word.

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Go online at www.theguardian.pe.ca click on  and follow the links to enter your name, contact information and the word of the day.

Contest runs from February 3 - February 21



