

Understanding Separation Anxiety

Family Matters

Most of us enjoy spending time with our pets.

The feeling is usually mutual.

But what happens when your pet struggles to cope when you're not there?

Many dogs—and occasionally cats—find being left alone difficult. While it's natural for pets to miss us, some experience genuine anxiety that affects both their wellbeing and your family's daily life.

At Amity, we believe understanding the cause of a behaviour is the first step towards helping your pet. Our purpose is to **Empower You Through Education**, so you can recognise the signs early and support your pet with confidence.

What Is Separation Anxiety?

Separation anxiety is more than simply missing you.

It's a state of panic that occurs when a pet is left alone or separated from a person they have formed a strong attachment to.

Your pet isn't being stubborn, spiteful or seeking attention.

They're frightened.

Understanding this changes how we respond.

What Are the Signs?

Every pet is different, but common signs include:

- Barking, whining or howling when left alone.
- Destructive chewing or scratching.
- Toileting indoors despite being house-trained.
- Pacing or restlessness.
- Excessive drooling or panting.
- Trying to escape.
- Following you constantly around the house.
- Becoming distressed as soon as you prepare to leave.

These behaviours usually occur only when you're absent or about to leave.

Why Does It Happen?

There isn't always a single cause.

Some pets have never learned that being alone is safe.

Others develop anxiety after a change in routine, moving house, a stay in kennels, the loss of a companion or following a period where family members were home much more than usual.

Just like people, some pets are naturally more anxious than others.

Could It Be Something Else?

Not every behaviour problem is caused by separation anxiety.

A dog that suddenly starts toileting indoors may have a urinary problem.

A pet that becomes destructive may simply be bored or under-exercised.

Pain and illness can also change behaviour.

That's why it's important to rule out any underlying medical conditions before assuming the problem is purely behavioural.

How Can You Help?

The good news is that separation anxiety can often be improved.

Start by:

- Building up time alone gradually.
- Keeping departures and arrivals calm.
- Providing enrichment toys and puzzle feeders.
- Ensuring your pet receives appropriate physical and mental exercise.
- Creating a safe, comfortable place where they can relax.

Avoid punishing your pet for behaviours that occur while you're away. Punishment increases fear and anxiety, making the problem worse rather than better.

For some pets, behavioural training alone isn't enough. **There are licensed veterinary medications specifically designed to help treat separation anxiety.** These don't replace training but can reduce anxiety enough for your pet to learn new coping skills more effectively. If appropriate, your vet can discuss whether medication should form part of your pet's treatment plan.

You're Not Alone

Separation anxiety can be upsetting for the whole family.

Remember, your pet isn't trying to make life difficult.

They're asking for help in the only way they know how.

At Amity, **Amity Essential Membership includes unlimited health checks**, so if you notice changes in your pet's behaviour, we'd be happy to assess them, rule out medical problems and discuss the most appropriate next steps.

With patience, understanding and the right support, most pets can learn that being alone doesn't have to be frightening.

Because a confident pet is a happier pet.

And a happier pet means a happier family.

Because they're not just your pet.

They're family.

Family Matters.

If you need more information, book an appointment with an Amity vet. We're here to Empower You Through Education and help you become your pet's greatest advocate.