

## Be Right Back! Podcast with Julie Naismith

### Episode 004 Transcript – Reasons You Need To Treat The Cause Not The Symptoms Of Separation Anxiety

<https://julienaismith.com/episode-04/>

Welcome to another episode of the Fixing Separation Anxiety podcast. I'm your host, Julie Naismith, and this week we're talking about tackling the cause, not the symptoms of separation anxiety. Now, if you're like most owners who are going through separation anxiety, I'm going to guess that you're at your wits end, either because your dog's barking or he's howling all day. Maybe he's destroying everything in your house or maybe he's going around your home soiling and you're coming back to little presents everywhere. Unless you've been through it, I don't think you can understand how tough separation anxiety is.

Separation anxiety is so tough on everyone. It's tough on you, it's tough on your dog. And I think unless you've been through separation anxiety, sometimes it's really hard to explain to people, isn't it, just how awful it can feel. You just want to scream, somebody please make it stop. You want the destruction to end. You just want him to stop barking, quit the howling. And don't you just want to look at him sometimes and say, I am coming back. I always come back. Like I say, unless you've been through it, it can be really hard to understand just how desperate it can feel to be dealing with separation anxiety. And of course, usually your immediate concern as a pet parent is, I have to stop these behaviors because this is affecting all of our lives. Maybe you've had neighbors complain or maybe your house is getting so destroyed you've almost given up repairing it because every time you do, he destroys something else. Maybe you're just so sick of your carpets being covered. Yeah, you do need to make it stop. But as you're probably finding out, the challenge with separation anxiety is that the behaviors, all those unwanted things, unwanted behaviors that the dog does, they are caused by your dog's panic. So he's not really intentional. He's not getting up one day and saying, I'm going to bark all day because I'm having fun or I do it for kicks. I do this destruction because, hey, why not remember that? He's freaking out. He's got a phobia to being left and he's terrified. So he's not being bad, he's not being mad at you. Just because he destroyed your carpet doesn't mean to say he's angry with you because you left. He's freaking out.

But we're usually looking for solutions to the symptoms, those symptoms that I described of barking or destroying or soiling or whatever it might be. When we Google, when we ask trainers, usually we're trying to find a solution to those symptoms. But let me give you an analogy, a medical analogy. So imagine you got occasional back pain. You might take a painkiller if it was bad enough and say you only got it once every few weeks or a few months, you might take a painkiller and the painkiller would work. But if you had severe back pain every single day, it was preventing you from doing stuff. I'm going to guess that you would soon decide to get to the root of the problem and not just take the painkillers, you'd take the painkillers too, but you'd say, no, this cannot continue. I need to find out what's causing the back pain. And so it's the same with a behavior condition like separation anxiety. You might be able to stop those symptoms. Might.

You might in the short term. But in the long term, the sticker bandage on it, stick a band aid on it approach doesn't work. If you've Googled, how can I stop my dog barking or destroying or whatever, you'll have seen a range of solutions and unfortunately most of them don't work and some can actually make the condition worse.

So I want to focus on what does work. You'll always hear me talk about that whenever I'm holding any of my mini training sessions or when I do my challenges, I'm always talking about let's focus on what works and ditch the stuff that doesn't. Okay? So let's talk about barking again. If we Google the advice on barking, we're going to find a ton of terrible information. The worst advice that I see, and I see it a lot, is to use a bark collar. These are designed to stop barking by giving your dog a shock. Now you will read that the dogs only get a static shock, just like when you put clothes on, that kind of static shock. But it's not true. That's just really slick marketing.

Don't be cross with yourself if you've been drawn in by that because they are clever and the companies who manufactured these things don't want you to think that your dog's being hurt. But unfortunately, that's what's happening. These shock collars work by hurting your dog. They create pain and they then scare your dog into stopping. And they only work, they only change behavior because they hurt. They don't hurt, they don't work. So you've got a dog who's barking at home. He's got a bark collar on and he's getting electric shock every time he barks. Guess what he thinks about being home alone now he's going to think this is even worse than it was before. His fear of being alone just got quadrupled because when he's home alone, not only is he petrified because you're not there, he's now being shocked painfully might suppress the bark. You may see some short term behavior change. He might decide that the way to stop the shock is to stop the barking. But he still wants to bark. He needs to bark. In his head, the panic that's caused by his separation anxiety makes him want to bark away with a lot of dogs, they will bark through the pain, which is a horrible thought. So now they're in a panic and they're creating this painful shock. And when his collar is not on, he definitely will want to bark. And he's more than likely going to bark when his collar isn't on. So shock collars are just not going to work for this. And even if they did work, we don't need to train dogs with pain and force and fear anymore because there are far better ways. Shock collars are banned in many countries for a reason. Hopefully they'll be banned in way more sooner rather than later. But we don't need them. We don't need them to train. There's way better ways. Okay, so let's give shock collars a wide berth.

When it comes to barking with destruction, there's two big things, two solutions that I see that are inhumane and unhelpful. First, one is using anything that's bitter and that the dog really, really finds disgusting. So again, it's a bit like the shock collar. They only work because they're so unpleasant, these sprays, that the dog will do what they can to try and avoid them. But I'm sorry, this is a horrible analogy. So I hope you're not eating your breakfast. But this is like to a dog, this is like you putting vomit on your food to lose weight. You just wouldn't do it, would you? But yet we would do it to our dogs. And then the other horrible thing, just like with shock collars, dogs can go through the disgust, they can go through the pain, they don't stop feeling it. But they're

so driven by their panic that they'll just keep going. So they'll keep tasting this disgusting spray. They'll keep going despite the fact that it tastes disgusting because the panic is driving them in.

An indestructible crate is another response. I see to destruction and I totally get it. If your house is being destroyed, what else are you going to do? You can't keep coming back to walls that are disappearing, to carpets that are shredded. I totally get it. And also your dog is getting harmed. Dogs who are in a panic can be extremely difficult to contain. They are not thinking. They are pumped on adrenaline. They are desperate, desperate to get closer to you. So those dogs who are destroying are desperately trying to get away from the panic of being on their own and try and find you for comfort. So an indestructible crate doesn't take away that panic. I talked about this in episode three. Dogs in a panic can be extremely difficult to contain. They are pumped on adrenaline. They are doing everything they can to escape the terrifying situation that they are in. They're not thinking. And so the things that happen as a result, crates that you thought were indestructible get destroyed. Or if the crate stays intact, even worse, the dog's nails or teeth or the damage that can be done by indestructible crates is really scary and saddening. If you're really struggling to stop the destruction, get your dog out of a crate and try confinement space. That's a space that's bigger than the crate. You'd use an X pen or you'd use extended baby gates. See if he does better then. Or use a dog proof room. That means a room where there's no stuff really, you're not worried about anything in there that he might destroy. And you're not going to be worried about him destroying himself in there either. So it's safe for him and it's stuff you're not worried about him destroying. Even things like confinement spaces and dog proof rooms, I'm still really hesitant to recommend them because they're still just focused on symptoms. They're not looking at how to fix your dog's anxiety, which, as we know, is the only way to stop him wanting to do these things. So what can you do?

I've ruled out a ton of things that don't work and things that I really advise you not to consider. So what can you do? Well, there are two biggies number one, you're going to train him to be happy home alone. You're going to do that by getting him used to being alone very gradually and safely. So we use a process called desensitization. That's where we work out how long your dog can cope with on his own without getting into a panic. Now, when you first set out, that could be seconds, but whatever that is, we work with that duration and we gradually increase that but at rate your dog is comfortable with. So each time we go through the exercise, we're checking in on the dog, how's he doing, is he okay with this? Any sign of panic? And if there's no panic and there's no anxiety, we progress to the next step.

Desensitization is the training method that we use to gradually get your dog comfortable on his own. But while you're doing that, so the second thing that you do is you have to find a way not to leave him. This can be one of the most difficult things that most owners ever have to do. It just seems nonsensical. If your dog's got separation anxiety, it wouldn't be an issue, it wouldn't be a problem condition if you didn't need to leave him at times. So when you first set out with separation anxiety training, it just seems ridiculous that anybody would ask you not to leave your dog. But do give it a shot, even just try leaving him a little bit less than you currently do because you'll start to see the benefits. And training is so difficult, if not impossible, if you don't suspend absences.

Remember, the great thing about suspending absences, about not leaving them anymore, is you just knock the anxiety on the head and so all those anxiety driven problems immediately go away. So while it can seem like a crazy, nonsensical ridiculous solution, it will fix the destruction and the barking immediately. Something to think about. If you still think that there's absolutely no way that you can find someone to be with your dog or have your dog be with someone 24/7, then there's maybe a couple more options you could try when you do have to leave your dog.

First off, I'd suggest you go to your vet. So go and speak to your vet about whether you can get some medications that would be short acting, so you give them to your dog when you did have to leave, and that would help reduce your dog's anxiety in that moment and lessen the chance that they're going to hurt themselves or bark or have a terrible experience. So medications, short term medications can be really helpful for those times when you just can't figure out a way not to leave him. Slight caveat here, that doesn't work for all dogs. So some dogs will still be so panicked that doesn't matter what medication you put them on, they're still going to have a freak out. But do consider talking to your vet about this as an option. It's worth a try. And we're not talking about you using this every single day for 8 hours a day. We're talking about meds that are medications that are situational. So you have something you absolutely have to do on Saturday afternoon and you cannot find cover. So you plan ahead and you use these short acting medications while you're at the vet. I would strongly suggest you talk about putting your dog on daily anxiety medications. These are something your dog would be on for the duration of his training. They help with his anxiety threshold. They help him be a bit less anxious in situations where he would normally have just completely freaked out. So they really can be game changers for separation anxiety. So if you haven't talked to your vet about medications, I really recommend that you do it. I know it's not what everybody wants to do for whatever reason. We think there's some stigma attached. We think that we shouldn't be putting dogs on medication, we think we failed as owners. But let me tell you, medication saves lives. It saves dogs lives because they really, really can be a massively powerful addition to the training protocol.

The other thing you could do if you're desperate and you just can't find anybody to have your dog for an afternoon or whatever, the thing is that you need to leave them for, you could consider including a queue which would distinguish between when they're having safe training absences. So you would need to be in training mode. You need to be training your dog the rest of the time. So you're going to introduce a queue which says this is training, this is safe and this is fine and I'm really sorry, but this is going to be scary and this is going to be horrible. So that might be when you go out and you know it's going to be really bad, you just say, I'm really sorry, this one's not going to be good. And you say the words every time you go out, and you know he's going to have a bad time so that he starts to learn really quickly. There's times when it's going to be bad and there's times when it's going to be safe.

Training is going to be safe because it's going to be short durations that he can handle. Sometimes you're going to have to go out and leave him and it's going to be horrible. Now, it doesn't work for all dogs, but some dogs will be able to distinguish between safe absences that

you do during training and the scary ones where you have to leave him longer than he can cope with. For those dogs where this distinction works, the training isn't affected by the scary absences. The problem is you don't know until you try it. And if you're training and you're trying to protect your training progress and then you have to leave your dog, you won't know until you've done it whether it's going to affect his training. Yeah, it just comes back to do whatever you can not to leave him, because it's going to be in the long run, it will make your training go quicker and it will tackle those symptoms way better than any of the short-term fixes that you might have found.