

## Be Right Back! Podcast with Julie Naismith

### Episode 008 Transcript – Does Excessive Greeting Mean Your Dog Has Separation Anxiety

<https://julienaismith.com/episode-08/>

In today's episode, we're talking about one of my favorite topics, which is excessive greeting the dog who goes absolutely bonkers when you come through the door. So if your dog does go crazy when you come home, then he's definitely got separation anxiety, hasn't he? Well, interestingly, we definitely used to think that that used to be one of the signs or one of the signs that people look for that a dog had separation anxiety. So a bouncing, crazy, jumping about like a kangaroo dog must definitely have separation anxiety. Also, we used to think. But that's no longer or not necessarily something that we hold to be a key test of separation anxiety. Because just because a dog is excited to see you when you get home, it doesn't mean that he was stressed out when you were gone. We mustn't assume that when we see a dog who's losing it as we come through the door, we mustn't assume that there's a problem.

Well, the problem might be that you're getting bowled over when you come through the door, but we mustn't assume that there's an underlying fear or anxiety that's causing that. And when you take the term excessive greeting, that word excessive is subjective. It could mean a very different thing to you as it could to me. It could mean a really different thing from one dog to another. That's the problem with words like that. It's not like the dog is brown or the dog is small, or the dog jumps up when I come in, or the dog barks when I come in. Saying excessive could mean totally different things in totally different contexts. So whenever somebody comes to me and says that they're really worried about excessive greeting, the first thing that I want to know is for them to tell me. Tell me about greeting in lots of different contexts. How normal is it for your dog to greet you in this way? Is it only when you've gone out and you've left them alone? Or does it happen in different contexts?

So let me give you an example of that, and I'll give you a little insight into my crazy household with my three adorable but bonkers dogs. So Percy is the one that is most definitely the excessive greeter. Oh, wait a minute, but isn't he the dog that has separation anxiety? Yep. But bear with me on this. India and Tex, they're the kind of dogs that I could go out and frankly, go out for like five days as long as I left them food and access to fun. They just like, look at me when I came back with a yeah, you're back, whatever kind of look on their face. Percy, no, not so much. And interestingly, Percy always gets the other two excited when we come through the door. But back to that point about what's excessive for Percy. The mornings are a great example with Percy. So Percy's been withers and around us. He sleeps in our room at night, in the morning. He goes crazy. When he first sees us. Now, he's not been anxious, he's not been on his own, he's been with us. He's just pleased to see us. So Percy's excessive greeting is, I just am so pleased to see you. Here's another example of why I don't think that why. I know his excessive greeting isn't related to his anxiety when someone comes to the front door. So not me, not my husband. We're at home, Percy's chilling with us when somebody comes to the front

door, rings a doorbell, which, incidentally, we've just got rid of. We've got one of those new video things and app-based doorbells, because gets to the stage where you just can't bear the doorbell ringing anymore. So somebody presses the invisible doorbell, no ringing thingy, if you know what I mean. And he will explode when people come through the door. Why? Because he loves people. He loves visitors. Visitors in our house are fun because we usually tell all visitors to give the dogs a treat when they come through the door. We want our dogs to love people, so we encourage people to do great things with our dogs. So Percy loves people. That's why he explodes. It's a him thing, not an anxiety thing. So we have to be really careful that we don't confuse a dog's personality. Or rather, we have to be careful. We need to take into account their personality when we're assessing their behavior.

And how do we do that? Well, we work out what's normal for them. If we want to know what's excessive, we need to know what the baseline is. And here's how you could do that. The first thing you could do is have a look at how he is when you come back after you've left him alone. Does he go crazy? Is he jumping up? How long does he take to calm down? That's also an interesting test. And I would say, actually, rather than being interested in how, quote, excessive their greeting is when you're coming in, I'm more interested in how long it takes them to go back to arrested state and go back to my own dog, Percy, again. When he was really anxious, before we knew he had separation anxiety, before I was a trainer, before I knew what the heck I was doing, he would take a long time to settle after we came in. And I mean, like, it could be tens of minutes before he would stop panting, stop pacing and be able to calm himself down. So to me, looking back, that was more of a sign that he was upset than the bouncing around because the bouncing around was normal for him.

Okay, so first off, number one, get your baseline. How is he when you do go out and he's anxious when you know that now hopefully you're not leaving him because you've worked out that not leaving him is the way you're going to fix separation anxiety. That plus the training. But say in the past, if you've done that, how was he? How was he when you left him and he got stressed while you were out?

Number two, say he's at home, but there's somebody else in the house. It could be the dog sitter, it could be the family member that you've got in to look after him when you come back. How is he? How does he act? So compare him to number one. Is he worse in that situation than he is when he's alone and you come through the door? Or is he better? There he is, he's chilling out with the dog city. You come through the door. Is he as crazy in that context as he was when he was on his own? So compare those two things and here's another interesting test to do.

Number three, consider how he reacts when he goes out. So when he goes with the dog walker, when he goes out with another family member, when he goes out with your other half, how does he greet you when he comes back through the door and use that same test? Does he react worse than when you leave him, the same or better? Because what that's telling you is that this is about how your dog greets you, not about whether he's been left or not. Do you see what I'm saying? So if he has been absent from you and he comes back and he's overjoyed to see you, that's really interesting data.

Now, I'm just going to pause for a second here, because if you've got a dog who has what we call true separation anxiety, what do I mean by that? Well, I mean a dog who cannot be separated from an individual person. So they are very, very focused on one or two individuals, and separation from that person is what gives them anxiety rather than just the isolation of being alone. And it gets really confusing, but the terms separation anxiety really relates to a dog who can't be separate from that one or two special people in his life. The condition of a dog who can't handle being home alone is actually more something we call isolation distress. I know it's incredibly confusing, but we call everything separation anxiety. So don't worry about those terms. Just worry about how is my dog at home alone? Can he be soothed by somebody being with him or does he have to be with me? Fortunately, only a small proportion of the dogs who struggle with this condition have to be with one or two people. Most dogs seem fine, thank goodness, with other people. All right? So if you have a dog who cannot be without you, then obviously this test number three of he goes out and he comes back, he's going to be more thrilled to see you than he will be to see another person because you are his world. Okay?

Number four, think about what he's like when people come round to the house and do the same test. Is he worse than when you leave him on his own? Is he the same or is he better? That goes back to the point I was making about Percy. When our doorbell goes, he's just over the moon because he loves visitors so much. So I would say if he's always, always greeting you more excessively in the first scenario, which is he's on his own, home alone and you come back, if that's his explosive moment, if that's when he greets quite excessively, then there is probably more a chance that that's being caused by his stress of being home alone. But if he's greeting crazily in most scenarios, then it's just a him thing, it's his personality.

So, if you know that number one is the cause of his bouncing around when you come in, you work on his anxiety, you don't leave him to go over his threshold and you train him to be happy home alone by using the sub threshold training method of gradual exposure to being on his own. If it's he's just a crazy greeter, then there are things you can do to help him along, things I really like. Now, lots of people will tell you to teach a really rock solid sit or a down and I do like those because those are what we call incompatible behavior. A dog can't do a down or a sit and jump up at the same time, so they're incompatible with what the dog is wanting to do. So if you can train that, so he goes into a beautiful downstay when visitors come or when you come back, he can't jump up and do a downstay at the same time. So often people trainers will tell you to work on that. It's usually a go to, it's usually the number one thing that we all tell you to do. However, with a really, really bouncy, excitable dog, even with the best training and the most repetitions of training sessions in the world, it can be hard to get a really rock solid downstay with a dog who just loves being with you. It's not that it's impossible, it's just that you're not a trainer and I don't suspect you want to spend hours and hours trying to get the outcome. So I like with these really bouncy, excitable, playful ones, I like giving them something to do because they've got all this energy. So rather than getting them to calm down, which takes an age, let's give them something to do where the focus helps them calm down. So I love a go get me setting him a task like go find a toy or go get my shoes or go get my slippers. Helping you put stuff away. So give him something to do. The great thing about that is while he's busy going finding

that special toy, when you come in, he's not jumping. He definitely can't jump. And if he's a barker and he's got a toy in his mouth, well, guess what? It's one of those incompatible behaviors again because he cannot bark with a toy in his mouth. Actually, no, that's not true, right? If you've got a barker, you know that they can bark whatever's going on. But the bark will be more subdued if he's got a toy in his mouth.

So those are my two favorite go to's. I particularly like number two because it's great for energetic bouncy dogs. And then a third thing that I like, and this works particularly well with anxious dogs, is rather than teaching something which seems more disciplined, like a really long downstay, still focusing things like downs and sits. But I like to do some really quick training. So rather than asking for a long duration in a downstay, I like what we call puppy push ups. So I get them to go down. I get them to sit down, sit down, sit. So you're interacting with them. You're giving them the attention that they need. You're not getting them to do something which is really quite challenging, like hold a downstair because they're not ready for that because they haven't done tons of training, but they're focused and they're doing something quite disciplined to down, sit down, sit, something like that. You could do hand targeting. You can do whatever you want in that context. Any little behavior that you've trained that you know is really reliable, get him to do that. Get him to do it until he seems like he's calmed down and he's no longer wanting to jump. Up and down, up and down.

So those are my top three. Doing a rock solid downstay, number one. Number two, doing a go get it or find my shoe or whatever. Number three, doing some really quick training drills like a sit and a down and sit and a down. And just a final note, and it relates to number three. Especially when a dog is really anxious and stressed out and can't calm down when you come through the door, don't ignore them. This comes up a lot. People will tell you that you have to ignore your dog. Remember that if your dog is anxious when you come through the door, it's not that they want you. It's not that they want your company. They need your company. They need your affection and interaction. So if they need it and you withhold it, it's actually punishing them. It's not just showing them that if they stop you'll, give them the affection and it's okay. That would work for a dog. Who isn't anxious. But for an anxious dog, if you do that, it's really punishing for them and they tend to really struggle. So I always say don't do that, interact with them. Number three is brilliant for that because you are interacting, but it's on your terms and it's nice and structured and it helps them to calm down.

So please, please, please, whatever you do, do not ignore an anxious dog. You can give them affection, you can give them a near ruffle. You don't have to punish them by withholding your affection. Isn't that good news? Anyway, thanks for listening this week. I hope this has been helpful. I would love to know your thoughts on excessive greeting. If you have one, post up on my Facebook page. Tell me what it's like to have one of these excessive greeters jump in my group and tell me all about what goes on when you come through the door and I will look forward to seeing you online next week. Bye for now.