

## Be Right Back! Podcast with Julie Naismith

### Episode 023 Transcript – Why Everything You've Tried Has Failed And What Will Actually Work Instead

<https://julienaismith.com/episode-23/>

Well, hi there. Welcome to another episode of the Fixing Separation Anxiety podcast. I'm your host, Julie Naismith. In today's episode, which is part one of a two-part series, we're looking at why everything you have tried to fix separation anxiety might not have worked. So that's this week, and then next week, we're going to be looking at what you need to do instead if you want to get your dog over separation anxiety.

So one of the things that I hear most often from new clients is I have tried everything to fix my dog's separation anxiety. It seems like all of us, and I'll include myself because I used to be a separation anxiety owner, all of us try a gazillion different things to try and fix separation anxiety and end up feeling like nothing is going to work. So if this is you, don't worry. You are not alone. Nearly every single one of us tries a long list of things before we find out what actually works. Now, today I'm going to be telling you why many of the things that you've tried have made absolutely no difference. And in order for you to understand why those things might not have made any difference, it's really important that we remember and remind ourselves of what's actually going on with our separation anxiety dog.

So the key thing with a dog who has separation anxiety, the key thing to remember is that your dog is in a panic. Your dog has a fear, a phobia of being home alone. So the unwanted behavior that gets you into trouble with the neighbors or the behavior which results in your home being destroyed, we've all been there. That behavior is caused by fear. So it's not your dog being bad. It's not a naughty dog. It's not a willful spiteful dog. It's not your dog getting back at you for you going out. It's what we call emotional behavior. It's emotional behavior that your dog cannot help. The behavior is driven by the dog's panic. Think of a child who wakes up in the middle of the night screaming because they're having a nightmare. And compare that with a child who has been told they can't have another ice cream, and so they go into a screaming fit. So compare and contrast those types of screaming. That's what you need to bear in mind when you think about what's going on with your home alone dog, because your home alone dog, when they bark, when they bark, when they destroy, is more like the screaming child who's having a nightmare. And the dog who barks and scratches and scrapes and tries to escape is not like the child who's having a screaming fit because they can't get another ice cream. So this is not your dog trying to get its own way. This is your dog who is petrified.

So with our panicking dogs, the way that we stop the unwanted behaviors, whether that's barking or whining, whether it's chewing or soiling destroying, trying to escape, you name it, there's a long list of things that panicking dogs get up to when they're home alone. In order to stop these problem behaviors, we have to stop the panic. Because as I said, what's driving these behaviors is an emotionist. These behaviors are driven by your dog's fear. And that in a

nutshell headline, is why so many of the remedies you've tried have failed because they, number one, either attempt to suppress the symptom these behaviors, remember, are symptoms of the dog's panic. So the remedies that you've tried and failed are either trying to suppress the symptom and not get to the root of the panic, or number two, they are trying to get to the panic, but they are just insufficient.

So let's look at the things you might have tried that I consider that fall into that first bucket, the things that we do to try to suppress the symptoms of panic. First off, one of the things there's so much advice about, there are so many articles written about one of the things that we do when our separation anxiety dog is destroying or soiling the house is we put them in crates. And if you've done that, I wouldn't be at all surprised because there is so much advice on the internet telling you to put your panicking dog in a crate. Okay, so the article maybe doesn't say that, but more likely than not, the article says separation anxiety can be fixed by crating your dog. Well, here's the really scary thing. For the vast majority of dogs with separation anxiety, being in a crate just makes things worse. So not only do they become more panicky and more petrified in the moment, but it can change their brains long term so that you end up with a dog who has a much more challenging condition. Their separation anxiety can worsen as a result of being put in a crate. So not improved. Their separation anxiety isn't fixed by being put in a crate. For a lot of dogs, their separation anxiety can worsen. But you've read those articles, haven't you? They're everywhere. Separation anxiety is fixed by an anxiety crate, an indestructible crate crating your dog during the day. I got to tell you now, no, that is not going to stop separation anxiety. What it might do, and maybe this is where people are coming at it from, is if you get lucky and you don't have a dog that panics so much it claws its way out of a crate, if you get lucky, you might stop the soiling. Although lots of dogs get so panicked they soil in their crate, which they're not supposed to, right? They're not supposed to want to do that. But when they're panicking. They do. You might get lucky and find that your dog doesn't escape to then destroy your floorboards or rip down your blinds.

But for the majority of separation anxiety, dogs, being in a crate just makes their condition worse. And I've seen some horrific sites. Dogs who've been in so called inescapable indestructible crates, who've ripped nails and broken teeth. And even if you don't see the damage done, even to the dog, even if your dog doesn't manage to physically harm itself whilst in one of these crates, they're damaged unto their brain is major. So that's why crates don't work. They do not work to fix separation anxiety because not only do they not work on the panic, in most cases they make the panic worse. All they do is contain the panic. An analogy I use is that I love my bedroom. It's a little bit of a haven, you know, you get in there, most of us feel like that right, it's a place we love to be. Of course it is. But I tell you what, if you, if I'm in my bedroom and the smoke alarm goes off and there's smoke coming underneath the bedroom door and I discover that the windows are locked and the door is locked, I ain't going to want to be in my bedroom. So shut me into my bedroom when I'm panicking and I'm going to hate being in there. That's what's going on with a dog who has separation anxiety and is crated. One thing you'll hear is, and this might even be your dog, but he loves his crate because he goes in there at night on his own or when we're eating dinner, he'll happily stay in his crate with the door closed, with a Kong. But as soon as we go out, all bets are off and he tries to escape. He goes

crazy. So that's the analogy. Go back to the thing thinking about your bedroom. You might love your bedroom, but if you're locked in there when the smoke alarm goes off and there's a fire in your home, you don't want to be in there anymore. And that's what's happening with your panicking dog. Okay?

So onto another so called fix that attempts to get at the symptoms, that tries to work on the symptoms of separation anxiety that doesn't go anywhere near the panic. Another quick fix is the bark collar. So this is an electronic device that gives your dog an electric shock, often remotely controlled, and it can be controlled on the basis of your dog's bark. And the idea being your dog barks, your dog gets an electric shock. So your dog then decides barking isn't a good thing, and I'm going to stop because I don't like getting an electric shock, okay? So at best, these devices only tackle the symptoms ie the barking. At best, they are not changing how your dog feels about being home alone. But here's the thing. At worst, and in fact, in the majority of cases, what happens is your dog not only now worries about you going out, because for whatever reason, that panics them, but they also worry about what happens when you're out, which is you put the bark collar on them and you give them an electric shock.

Can you now imagine what goes on in the dog's brain? I hate it when Mum goes out and now she's shocking me when I'm out. I really, really don't want her to go. Now, he may not realize that it's you doing the shock and it might be a remote control collar, but the thing is, your dog is now associating being home alone with not only the fear of being isolated, but now the fear of an electric shock coming his way. So we are not working on our dog's panic at all. We might get lucky. I hate to even think about this and suppress a couple of barks, but more likely than not, we are making our dog even more anxious and fearful about being home alone. So get your bark collars, put them in the bin, put them in the trash can. Ignore everything the marketers tell you about these devices because they do not have to tell you how these things work. Do not buy into the fact that they just give your dog a buzz. Do not buy into the fact that it feels okay when you try it on yourself. These devices work because they hurt and they only work if they hurt. If they don't hurt your dog, your dog will not stop barking. They have to be strong enough to hurt in order to work. So do not use these devices. Put them in the garbage can, people. Okay?

A third device that I see increasingly being used, which is fairly harmless in and of itself, but can be used incorrectly, is a camera, a remote camera that you can talk to your dog on. I mean, this can be any surveillance camera, but a camera where your dog can hear you, hear you speaking. So you might do a skype to skype call, you might do a FaceTime call. You might use one of the dog cameras on the market. I've heard owners say that what they do is they monitor their dog, and when their dog starts to bark or destroy or whatever, they give the dog a really sharp correction. So they tell their dog off. Hang on a minute, though. Remember what we said about your dog's panicking. That's why your dog is doing the things that they are doing. So go back to the child who's having a nightmare. Back in the day, maybe a parent would have gone into that bedroom and screamed at the child to shut up because why are you having a nightmare? I think most of us now recognize that when a child's having a nightmare, what they

need is help to get over their fear of nighttime not being screamed at for being bad. So why are we correcting our dogs for panicking at their fear at being alone?

Most of the times, most owners will tell you that talking to your dog remotely doesn't help and correcting. Well, we don't need correcting in dog training anymore. That's not something we do. When dogs do things that we don't want them to do, we help them change how they feel about what they want to do. So we either give them an alternative behavior or we change how they feel. We change the emotion behind the behavior. Okay, so those cameras are great for watching your dog while you're gone. And everybody should be watching their dog, but don't use them to correct and actually don't correct your dog anyway. There's far better ways to train than correcting your dog. Okay? So those are the things that we most commonly use to suppress behaviors.

But now let's talk about my second bucket, which is the things that attempt to get at the cause of the panic, but which don't seem to get anywhere near. First off, there's a big category. There's lots of different types of these, and I'll call them wraps and vests. So you will see these on amazon. There's all different varieties. They tend to be close fitting items of clothing, essentially that wrap around the dog or the dog's chest and body, maybe something that wraps around their face and so on. So the idea being is that these are supposed to make a dog feel calmer. I've seen so many owners use this on their dog, and I've used it on my dog. I used something like this on my dog many years ago, but I've never seen it make a significant difference. I've never seen a wrap or a vest make a significant difference to the dog's panic. I've also surveyed owners on this, and most owners say it didn't work. Now, it might be that because people come to me because the wrap and the vest didn't work. And there might be thousands of owners out there who say their separation anxiety dog got better as a result of a wrap or a vest. And so they don't come to me. They don't come to a separation anxiety trainer. But the people I work with and the people in my group, there's about eight, 9000 people in my group. Now, it's very rare to see somebody say that a wrap help their dog. So it might be something that could help with, I don't know, low level stress, maybe some mild discomfort. But it doesn't seem to be enough for a dog who's in a panic about being home alone.

Okay, next category would be things like Kongs, puzzle feeders, anything really that is a puzzle game based on food. So something where the dog has to work for food. And I love all of these. My house is full of Kongs. I love Kongs. I love puzzle feeders, but most separation anxiety dogs are not going to be interested in something like that. Or if they are, they are so manic about it that they'll almost destroy the Kong in their energy to get in their drive to get the food out. And then what can happen is when the puzzle feeder, so say your dog is one of those separation anxiety dogs who will eat when you're out. There aren't that many, but there are some. The food ends and then what happens? Have you seen this? What happens when the food ends? They fall apart, right? They fall apart. So in that moment of consuming the Kong or working on the puzzle feeder, what's going on? If the dog isn't feeling less panicked, the dog is kind of just distracted from what's going on. And as soon as they realize what's happening to them ie. when the food runs out, the panic sets in. And you might have seen this if you've used a Kong or a feeder or anything like that while you're out so they have their use. I mean, if your dog will

happily jump on a Kong for 30 minutes before getting panicked, that 30 minutes will give you time to go to the shops, go get some groceries or maybe just nip out and have a really quick coffee with somebody. But you got to be wary of the fact that when that food finishes, you need to be back before them because they're going to be in a panic.

So I like to use puzzle feeders as a management strategy, but they don't change how your dog feels about going. You leaving them. Okay, the third remedy that I see lots of people resort to calming chews, calming diets, calming anything. We're talking about supplements, we're talking about natural, so-called natural remedies and tablets. And if you go onto Amazon and what I find interesting here is that if you do a search on anxiety remedies for dogs versus anxiety remedies generally there are so many for dogs, there's a massive market for this. So again, we all buy into it. We all think that these are going to help. I just don't see it. I don't see these calming whatevers having a sufficient impact on the dog's panic. So they may be having an impact, but not enough to change how a dog feels about their fear of being alone.

Okay, three more categories. Next one, diffusers and sprays. Lots of us have tried these again. In fact, you know what, I bet everybody if you're listening to this podcast, you've probably tried most of the stuff I've gone through, though hopefully not the bark collar. Diffusers and sprays. The idea is these are supposed to replicate the pheromones that is given off by a lactating mum. And whether that's a dog mum or a cow mum or a human mum, lactating mums give off pheromones. So you can buy these sprays. You can buy them sprays or diffusers. And once again, when I poll people and I ask them, have you used these? The vast majority of people who have used them say that it doesn't seem to change their dog, doesn't seem to make that much of an impact, if at all, to their dog separation anxiety. Now, there are people who swear by these. There are owners who swear that the diffuser makes all the difference and that the spray is everything. But they are less common than the people who say the diffuser and sprays don't work. Obviously, the manufacturers are very careful to tell you that you must use the sprays and diffusers as instructed, otherwise they won't work. But even when I probed people about that, it seems like most dogs don't respond enough or at all to these to help fix the separation anxiety panic.

And then we've got exercise. So surely if your dog is exercised enough, they're going to feel really calm and chilled when you leave them. Well, yeah, some dogs, some dogs will be fine with a lot of exercise before you leave. But the problem with panic is panic and fear. Panic and fear take over the body. Let's go back to the analogy of me lying in bed or you lying in bed, middle of the night, smoke alarm goes off. Now, what's your reaction when your smoke alarm goes off at 02:00 A.m. In the morning? Do you A, roll over, say to yourself, oh, that's fine, I'm too tired, I had a long day, and you go back to sleep? Or do you B leap out of bed, rush out of the room, heartbeat pounding, heart pounding, adrenaline levels sky high to investigate? I suspect it's B, right? Doesn't matter how tired you are, if you think your house is about to burn down, you are going to react. And that's what's going on with these separation anxiety dogs. So exercise is really important. Separation anxiety dogs do need exercise and they do need enrichment. But exercise on its own is not enough to stop them panicking. It might make them a bit less likely to go into a full blown panic immediately, but it will not change their fear of being home alone. Just



like you in your bedroom when the smoke alarm goes off. Doesn't matter how tired you are, you will respond.

Okay, last one. Calming music. Calming music that's either designed for dogs or maybe it might be just a nice classical music soundtrack. But I also know people who swear by rock music for dogs or pretty much anything. Now, let me preface this by saying I am a massive fan of playing music, background noise, whatever, when you leave, when you leave your dog, why is that? Because lots of dogs will react to noises outside. And even if they don't react when you're around, there's always the chance that they might be more alert to noises outside when you leave them. So I love using music. I actually really like things like brown noise and white noise. I love using things like that to deaden or to muffle outside sounds. But do those noises, does that sound, does that music stop your dog's anxiety and panic? Again, I don't see it. I don't see it happening. And remember, I see hundreds of dogs and I poll people about this stuff and I just don't see it happening. But I do think it's a good thing. So if you find a channel that your dog loves or that you love, by all means play it. When you go out deaden, those outside noises, it's one less thing to worry about. Oh, and by the way, you'll hear that putting on the radio or the TV or the stereo, oh, gosh, I showed my age there. I said stereo or the music or streaming the music can be a trigger. Well, yes and no. That's a whole topic. That's a topic for a whole other episode.

But triggers are only problematic if they say to your dog that this thing that I'm doing is going to predict something bad. So a cue, something that we do every time we go out, is only problematic if we go out and leave our dogs to be frightened. But when you're doing separation anxiety training, and I'll come on to that next week, the things you do before you go out predict a safe absence. So when people start using music during training absences, the music, the TV going on, the radio going on, says to the dog, this one's going to be fine, so don't get too hung up on putting the TV on is going to trigger them, okay? So those are my things that attempt to tackle the panic, but just don't seem to get to do that. If I were to summarize the issue that I see, I think it's that all of these just aren't strong enough. They just don't tackle the fear in an effective enough way. They're just not sufficient. An analogy that I always think about is, would you recommend any of these to someone you knew who had severe agoraphobia, which is fear of outside spaces, fear of the outside, fear of big spaces? Would you recommend, I don't know, a lavender spray to help somebody with a fear of agoraphobia take one step outside of the house? I don't think you would. And yet we think that these sorts of things are going to fix our dog's extreme fear and panic. And dogs and humans have quite similar physiology and neurochemistry.

But that makes me wonder why then are there so many remedies for dogs, anxiety remedies for dogs that don't seem to work. And I reckon it's because here's the thing. This is why I think there are so many remedies for dogs that we wouldn't recommend for people. It's because dogs cannot tell us if these are working or not. And we do know from research that when we treat dogs, there is a massive placebo effect. What do I mean by that? We might see an effect when it's not there. We might see a benefit. Even though placebo-controlled experiment, some of the participants are given something that will not work, is nothing, will not impact, is not the product

or is not the medication. And so the placebo effect is where we see an outcome. Even in the group that had no medicine or wasn't administered the test product. The placebo effect is particularly high in dog experiments because they can't tell us and we also want to see an outcome. So I do wonder if that's what's going on and why there are so many anxiety remedies for dogs, because they can't tell us what's going on and we kind of want to see a positive outcome. So when I look back at that whole list, I've just gone through with you some of these treatments you need to avoid at all costs. Don't crate your dog if he's panicking. Don't crate your dog if your dog does worse in the crate, get them out of the crate, because you're going to be doing yourself and your dog a massive favor. And absolutely no punishment-based training for these guys.

Please, let's not treat fear with fear. It doesn't make any sense at all. But then there's some of these other things that I've talked about, particularly the latter ones. Maybe like puzzle feeders, maybe like diffusers and sprays. I used to say they fall into what I consider to be the can't harm might help category. Give them a try. Who knows? Your dog might be the one. One of those dogs that does respond to the diffuser problem is I think I've changed my mind on this because the problem is I actually do think they cause harm. And why? Because they cost time. They take time, they take money, and they take emotion. So to me, that is harmful. And most of all, while you're going through the process of trying all these different things that don't work, you're putting off working on the things that does work. The thing, the training method that does work and does help get dogs over separation anxiety. And that's what we're talking about. In the next episode, we're going to talk about exactly what does work, what you need to do, and how you can start addressing your dog's separation anxiety training and separation anxiety condition today.

Okay, that's it from me right now. I hope you'll tune in for next week's episode. Really, really grateful that you join me today because I know you have a lot of choices when it comes to podcasts and to listening. So I do appreciate it. And I've got a massive favor to ask. If you liked this podcast, I'd love it. If you could head over to iTunes and rate and review, I'd be so grateful if you could do that. All right, so I hope to see you on next week's episode. Meanwhile, bye for now.