

Be Right Back! Podcast with Julie Naismith

Episode 030 Transcript – Why Some Solutions That Seem to Work Aren't Actually Working for Your Dog

<https://julienaismith.com/episode-30/>

Well, hello there and welcome to another episode of the Fixing Separation Anxiety podcast. I'm your host, Julie Naismith, and this week I'm going to be talking about the solutions that you hear people rave about, the ones that they swear by as having been the solution that got their dog over separation anxiety, but solutions which in fact may not be working either for them, almost especially for their dog. People write about this stuff all the time, whether that's in the Facebook group that I run on social media where I see comments or in blogs. I hear it all the time, this thing, this process, this tool, this whatever, this works for my dog. And quite often I feel really sad when I hear that phrase because what works for us doesn't always work for our dogs. And I don't think we're taking a dog centric enough approach to treating separation anxiety.

Now let's have a look at the few or a few of the things that I'm often hearing in quotes, air quotes. Here work. The first one is bark collars. I almost hate even to go there because there's just something to me about this whole notion of fixing a fear-based condition, separation anxiety with something that induces fear and pain, a shock collar. There's just something about that that it leaves me aghast. I just think, why can't people wrap their heads around this? You cannot fix fear with fear. So what does a bark collar actually do? And why does it air quotes again, work or seem to work? Well, as I said, a bark collar induces fear. It does that through giving your dog an electric shock. The electric shock is unpleasant, it's painful. And the dog decides to stop whatever it was doing, possibly, possibly stop. I'll come on to why it might not stop. The dog decides to stop what it was doing because the shock was so horrible. So you may hear people say, I put a shock collar on my dog while I was out and the barking stopped. People don't normally say shock collar. They will say bark collar. Sounds cozier, doesn't it? Sounds less scary. So I put this bark collar on my dog and the dog stopped barking. If that happened, then the dog was frightened into suppressing its behavior. If a bark collar stops a dog vocalizing while you're out, it is not changing how your dog feels about being home alone. It's just causing the dog to suppress the behavior that it thinks might be causing the shock.

Now, oftentimes the shock won't even stop the barking. So the dog gets a shock but doesn't understand why it's getting a shock, doesn't connect it with the barking, and so continues barking. Quite often it's not even working to suppress the behavior. So the dog's getting a shock. It doesn't know why. It doesn't connect it with the barking. It keeps barking, it keeps getting shocked. So kind of worst of all worlds, not only does the barking not suppress the unwanted behavior, but it's also inducing fear morphed in your dog. And here's the thing. What if you put a shock collar on your dog every time you go out? Is your dog going to feel better or worse about you going out? It's going to feel worse. It's going to feel way worse. It's potentially going to feel even more frightened about being home alone, because when it's home alone, it

gets a painful electric shock. So bark collars definitely don't work. They don't work for you, they don't work for your dog.

The next thing that I hear works for my dog would be crates, indestructible crates in particular, or some manufacturers call them anxiety crates. I can't get my head around that. Anxiety crates, for a dog who hates being confined. Yeah, actually, anxiety crate might be the right term, because if your dog is crate phobic and you put it in an indestructible crate that it cannot escape, you will increase its anxiety. So maybe anxiety crate is actually a really good term for these crates. Crates don't get dogs over. Separation anxiety crates don't make dogs feel better about being home alone. At the very best, crates will just like bark collars, stop the problem behavior, maybe suppress the behavior, stop the things that you're concerned about, like pooping and peeing and chewing and destroying. So at best, you might get that result. The problem you face, though, is that if your dog is afraid of being in a crate, which lots of separation anxiety dogs are, you're going out, you're leaving your dog home alone, which is frightened of anyway. Then you're putting your dog in a crate from which it can't escape. And now you've increased the dog's fear of being left home alone.

So you create a problem with a crate, it feels like you're fixing it in that moment when you come home and there's no destruction, it feels like you're fixing it. But you are not creating a dog who feels happy home alone. And I've seen it time and time again. I've seen dogs destroy themselves in indestructible crates. I've seen dogs who get a condition that lasts way longer than it needs to by being shut with their fear into an indestructible crate. But of course, you need to stop the destruction. And I'll come on to later in this podcast how you can do that, because I totally understand, like the barking. You need to stop the barking. You don't want to be kicked out of your home. Okay, one more thing that I hear people talk about as working, and that's anti chew sprays. If you don't know what these are, these are sprays that you would put on anything that you don't want your dog to get to. You don't want your dog to chew or to destroy. So maybe that's the door. Maybe it's furniture legs or whatever. People will say, I use an anti chew spray and it stopped my dog chewing. It worked to stop my dog chewing.

Sprays are no different in the way they work from bark collars. The goal of a spray is to be so disgusting that your dog will not go near the object that the spray has been used on. It's a stomach-turning response from your dog. It would be like me and sorry, this is going to be gross, but it would be like me pouring vomit over your dinner to make you diet. You would not want to eat if I did that to your evening meal. This is what a spray does. So it's not nice, it's not kind, it is not humane, it is not working for your dog. It may temporarily offer you some relief, but it is not working for your dog. And most likely it won't work for you in the longer term. That's the irony of all of these so-called solutions that work. They might temporarily hide the problem, but they do nothing more than suppress it. So they aren't actually working for you either. And more often than not, particularly bark collars and indestructible crates, they make things worse. They can make a dog more anxious about being home alone. But I get why they are so popular. The marketing is slick. They promise quick fixes and outside looking in if you do not understand what's going with these devices, these crates work.

But there is no quick fix for separation anxiety. It does not exist. And I know that's bad news because you're getting letters from neighbors. You're coming home to a house that looks like a murder scene, I get it. But there isn't a quick fix. If there was, I would tell you about it, I promise. Searching for an immediate fix. All that does is it results in you losing time and money and a ton of emotional energy gets lost. Most of the time, these quick fixes work by luck. They are acting on the problem symptoms. They are not changing the behavior underlying those symptoms. So what do you need to do? Well, instead of trying to stop the symptoms of your dog's panic, whether your dog barks, chews, defecates, whatever your dog's particular thing is, instead of trying to stop that outward sign of panic, you need to stop your dog from panicking in the first place. And then you need to teach your dog that being home alone isn't scary.

The two big things, therefore, that you need to get onto. One, you do have to stop leaving your dog, especially if you've got neighbors complaining, especially if your dog's destroying your house. If you stop leaving your dog today, you are going to stop the problem barking. You are going to stop the chewing, the destroying the soiling or whatever it is your dog's doing. Now, I know it seems ridiculous that people say to you, you need to stop leaving your dog. Because if you could do that separation anxiety wouldn't be a problem, would it? And I remember feeling that way. If you're feeling crestfallen or angry or frustrated or you want to cry, I remember feeling that way too. And I remember saying, I can't do it. I just cannot find a way to do it. We lived in a really small town. There was no daycare. The nearest daycare was in the city, 100 km away, 70 miles away, so there were no options. But equally, I had no option but to find a way not to leave my dog. So I put an advert in the local online classifieds and found some wonderful people who were more than happy to come and spend a few hours lounging with my fearful dog, taking him out for a walk if he wanted, or frankly, just sitting on the sofa with him.

It always seems impossible until it's done. Oh, I love that Nelson Mandela quote, it always seems impossible until it's done. And trust me, there isn't an owner out there, I don't think, who hasn't thought, this is impossible. I cannot find a way not to leave him. And sometimes it seems like there are people who have these amazing unicorn lifestyles. I call them unicorn lifestyles because they're so imaginary, they almost don't exist. But they have this perfect lifestyle that's accommodating of a separation anxiety dog. And we kind of think that our life is somehow totally different from that. But I work with so many people in so many difficult situations who I think there's no way they're going to be able to do this, not leaving their dog. And they do. Even people who are retired or work from home, you might look at them with envy and think that's fine, that's okay for them. But I don't know about you, I found actually the more difficult times to get help. It wasn't during the day, it wasn't during the day when people who work from home have the luxury of having their dog around. It was the stuff like going somewhere on a Saturday night or popping out on Sunday lunchtime. So people in your similar situation do find ways to do this, even if it seems impossible. Now, are you a cold turkey type when it comes to change, or are you an incremental? I like to change bit by bit, because if you're the latter, then what you can do on this suspending absences thing is you can say, all right, next week I will leave my dog for 1 hour less or maybe one day less. Just commit to that much change and then see if you can eke that up a little bit the next week and so on.

So maybe you can't go cold turkey on this, maybe it's too difficult, complicated, expensive right now, but try to leave your dog a little bit less next week and keep doing that until your dog has company as much as it needs. That's going to stop the neighbors, stop the destruction, but it's also going to set your dog up for training success. And set you up for training success because the second thing you're going to do is use training to teach your dog that being home alone is fine. And how do we do that? We use sub threshold training, which means we keep our dogs comfortable, anxiety three and under threshold while we gradually expose them to alone time. Usually we start with tiny, tiny amounts, seconds, sometimes less than seconds, sometimes no seconds, sometimes just opening and closing the door. And we progress as long as our dog is comfortable with what we are doing, as long as our dog is anxiety free. So we go at our dog's pace, we don't go too far, we don't go too fast.

And the great thing about this process, not only is it evidence and science based and tried and trusted, and you can read about success stories either in my Facebook group or my Facebook page or in my book. It's tried and trusted but it works not just for you. Believe me, I want this for you, but it works for your dog as well. It's kind, ethical and humane on your dog. So isn't it great to have a process that works for both you and your dog? Now, I'm not going to lie to you, this training is going to take time and you need to think months and months. Yeah, I did say months and months, not even weeks and weeks. If you are still standing or sitting and you haven't fainted, if you are not in floods of tears, and I hope you're not, if you are not feeling like I've just punched you in the stomach, then keep listening to me. The reason it takes this long is because you're helping your dog recover from what is essentially a deep psychological disorder, deep psychological trauma. And that kind of change, whether that's changing a person who's gone through a terrible sequence of events or changing a dog, helping a dog to change that kind of change is a long haul process. Brains don't change very easily. We're not teaching our dogs to sit, we're helping them get over trauma. That's why it takes as long as it takes. And if we rush it, we don't make progress. You have to go slow to go fast with separation anxiety training.

So if you're still with me, let me tell you that I know you can do this. I really know you can. You wouldn't be on this podcast if you weren't the type of person who can get this done. And I'm here to do whatever I can to help you. There's lots of ways I can do that. You could go and get my book, which has how to train, it has how to survive Separation Anxiety. You can find that on Amazon. You can dive into the free Facebook group dog Separation Anxiety support, join one of my paid programs where, especially in my Separation Anxiety Heroes club, people get a ton of attention from me, a ton of time and from one another as they work through training together. And of course, I can help you through this podcast. There are so many ways I can help you. So I need you to tell me, are you in? Are you up for this? Because if you are, I'm here for you. Okay? I want to say thank you for listening, because that's it from me for now. And I am so grateful for you tuning in because I know you've got a ton of options for listening, and I will see you on another podcast very soon. Bye for now.