

# Be Right Back! Podcast with Julie Naismith

## Episode 063 Transcript – Answered! Your Most Frequently Asked Questions (Part 1)

<https://julienaismith.com/episode-63/>

So you've started the training. You're using gradual exposure to gently get your dog over his fear of being left, and you're committed to it. You're taking action, but you've got questions. It's one of those processes that's kind of simple at a high level. But when it comes down to it, there are lots of little nuances. And everybody's always got very specific questions about, well, how does this work and... What do I do here?

And that's why in this week's episode, I'm going to be covering the most frequently asked questions that you have about doing training. In fact, there are so many of them that I'm going to do this in two episodes. So you'll get some this week and some in the next episode. All right, let's dive in.

Hello, and welcome to the Be Right Back Separation Anxiety Podcast. Hi, I'm Julie Naismith, dog trainer, author, and full-on separation anxiety geek. I've helped thousands of dogs overcome separation anxiety with my books, online programs, trainer certification, and Separation Anxiety Training app. And this podcast is all about sharing my tips and tricks to help you teach your dog how to be happy at home alone, too.

Okay, first question then when I'm doing the Desensitization training, how long do I leave between each step? So, quick refresher if you're not sure what we mean by Desensitization training, you're basically exposing your dog to a tiny, tiny, tiny amount of alone time. Enough alone time that your dog is okay with, but not so much that it stresses your dog out and causes your dog to get anxious.

Now, for lots of dogs, you might be starting on seconds, like literally a handful of seconds, a few seconds. That's a really common place to start. And the way you build up a training plan is you'll have a number of repeated steps where you'll go out of the door for a few seconds and come back. And that's where the majority of dogs start on just a few seconds of going out and going back. If you want more info on how to build a training plan, don't forget all of this stuff is available in my Be Right Back books.

But I'm not going to dive into that here. I'm going to assume that you're already working on the training and you just want to know, well, how does this work and what do I do with that? So a question that comes up all the time is this one how long? Do I leave between each of those steps?

You want to think about leaving between about 30 to 60 seconds to start off with. So if your training plan has ten steps in it, step one, you'll go out, maybe it says 3 seconds. Maybe you've

developed a training plan that says step one is 3 seconds. And by the way, side note, always train with the training plan. Always know what you're going to do at the start of a session.

So step one, you're going to go out of the door for 3 seconds, and then when you come back, that's when you're going to wait. That 30 to 60 seconds. You can vary it. It can be different. You can switch it up between each step, maybe one step you just do 30 seconds, between step two and three you might do 40 seconds, whatever. Just mix it up a little bit. Don't overthink this one. Give yourself that amount of time. This is very dog dependent. So you come back between step two and three. You say, going to hang out for about 40 seconds. Some dogs do much better with the training session overall if you come right back in. And by that I mean maybe go back to the living room or the kitchen.

Some dogs do much better when you do that. And in fact, some dogs really like it if you come back in and you sit down. Some dogs really don't like that. For some dogs, that seems to stress them out, that you come right back in into the living room and you sit down. So you need to test this one out, what to do between the steps. You can come back in, come and sit down on the sofa, check your emails. You could do that. You could also try coming back in and kind of just pottering about, wandering around, doing stuff, maybe tidying or quickly putting the kettle on. So test out what you do when you come back. Some dogs really hate it if you come right back in. So with those dogs, you want to spend more time kind of hanging out by the door. So back to your training plan.

Say you've got those ten steps. Step one, you might go out for whatever it says in your training plan that you devised, and you come back in. And then those are your three options. You come right back in and you sit down. You come right back in, but you do stuff. Or you just hang out by the door until it's time for step two, and then you go out again. Come back in, work out for your dog. Which option works best for your dog? Come back in, sit down, come back in, wander around, don't come back in. Just well, do come back in, but hang by the door.

Alright, question number three. How long should a training session be? Look, separation anxiety training, let's be honest. It's not the most fun activity in the world, is it? Hands up, let's be honest. And if you're telling me that you love nothing more than to do separation anxiety training, I'm not going to believe you. Well, maybe it makes you feel good because you know that you're doing the thing that's going to give your dog the most chance of feeling happy when you leave. I mean, even in the scheme of dog training stuff, it's not fun, is it?

It's probably more fun to work on loose leash walking where we can get the treats out and have loads of fun with repeat rewards. Agility is way more fun. Fly ball is way more fun. Even going to skills classes, that's way more fun, isn't it, than separation anxiety training. So when people ask me how long a training session should be, I'm always trying to balance how much training we need to get under our belt in order to help these dogs get over their fear of being left, with the fact that you've got a life, the fact that you probably aren't getting up in the morning and saying, "Yippee, I

can't wait to do separation anxiety training today." So a good number to start with is around 30 minutes.

Now, if you're just starting out, your exercise, ten steps, eight steps, or whatever it is you've got in your training plan, the training plan that you've written will probably take you less than 30 minutes. And so if that's you, you could then do double exercises. If your exercises are only taking you ten minutes in total and your dog's doing really, really well, it's fine to then do a new exercise and just push on a little bit if your dog's doing really well.

As your target duration increases, you're going to spend more time on a single exercise, and it won't take you very long to get up to that 30 minutes by the time you've set up and hanging out in between each of those steps. So 30 minutes is a really good guideline when you get to target durations that start to get quite lengthy. Hashtag, nice problem to have. You're going to struggle to fit training sessions in, and when it gets to the point where your training sessions are taking you 45 minutes or an hour or even longer, well, then obviously you're going to spend more than 30 minutes because your target duration is more than 30 minutes. Even if your target duration is 20 minutes or 25 minutes, chances are your total exercise is going to take you more than 30 minutes. So don't worry about the 30 minutes limit then. It's not hard and fast, it really is just a guideline.

Question number three then, how often should I train? Well, again, let's go back to fitting stuff in. I would much rather you were realistic with how often you could train every week than you set yourself a really ambitious goal every Monday and say, 'I am going to train every single day. I'm going to smash it.' I mean, for a start, you don't need to train every single day. And in fact, days off are really important because it gives everybody a rest and it gives your dog's brain a rest. So four or five times a week, that's a really, really good number to be aiming for. But it is quite an ambitious goal for a lot of people. It's hard to fit in four or five training sessions a week. So if that's you, then start Monday by saying, 'I will train for...' and here's what you're going to do. You're going to say a number of times that you absolutely know you can get, so make it really, really easy.

Make the goal for the number of times you're going to train in a week super easy. And then if you get more than that, you'll feel great. The problem with big, ambitious goals is that we can do what we call 'achieve or quit.' So you say, 'I'm going to train five times this week,' and it gets to Wednesday and you haven't trained once. And all of a sudden you're feeling that pressure whether I'm going to fit the five times in. So what do you say? 'I'm not going to do five times this week. I tell you what, I'll start again next week. I'll reset and I'll start next Monday with a goal of five times.' So you kind of give up because it was so hard to get your five sessions in that you did none.

A way better approach to this, and this is proven in behavioral science, by the way, is to set an easier goal, achieve it, and then you'll feel great. You'll get a big dopamine hit, and that feeling of achievement will make you want to train more. Sneaky. But good sneaky, though. On that Monday when you're thinking about how often you're going to train this week, say something like 'once or

twice.' Honestly, I would rather you train once or twice. And if that's all you did, that's fantastic. But I'd rather you did that than say, 'I'm going to train five times' and feel so overwhelmed that you end up training zero. So never post a zero. Always aim for an easy goal. And anything else is a bonus. Four or five times would be amazing. If you can only do once, no problem. But maybe next week you come back and say, 'I'll start with one, and then I will really try to do a bit more.'

All right, this links to question number four. What if I don't have time to train? So this is going to be you if you do, like most people, have a very, very busy life. You're working, you're tired when you come home. This question also comes up with people who, as I mentioned before, get to those longer durations. So let's just start with, I literally just don't have time to train. Do something tiny.

Don't think I've got to find five sessions of 30 minutes this week, otherwise I'm doomed. I might as well do nothing. Don't think like that. Instead, say, can I just find five minutes this week? If you can find five minutes during your seven days to do separation anxiety training, you're doing way more than the vast majority of people who don't work on their dog's separation anxiety. So that's something to feel good about. But honestly, if you've got one of those weeks where you just feel completely slammed, just say to yourself, 'I'm going to find five minutes, maybe ten minutes.' And if that's all the time you've got, then that's fine. Just do half an exercise or just do door as a ball, but don't do nothing because you feel like you can't even find five minutes. I bet you can find five minutes. I bet you can.

And here's the sneaky thing. See, I like these little sneaky habit type things. Sometimes when we say, 'I'm just going to train for five minutes, that's all,' sometimes that five minutes can become ten, it can become 15, and before you know it, you've done a full training exercise. If you don't have time to train, just dial it right back and say, 'I'm just going to find five minutes and that's what I'm going to do.' If you're on really long durations, finding time to train is a really legitimate issue. How do you fit in two-hour training sessions five times a week? Again, as I said earlier, hashtag nice problem to have.

Well, if this is you, then what you're going to do is think about maybe doing one or two long sessions a week. But the rest of the time, you can dial down the duration. You don't have to train for your long target durations all the time. If you're one of those lucky people that's training for an hour, you don't have to do five sessions of 1 hour or so target duration every week. Do a couple of those if you've got time to do a couple. And then for the rest of the week, do two or three where you do a very short duration or short compared to your current target duration or do door as a ball. So when you get to those lofty durations, it's just about keeping in the game with repetition. So you can dial it right back and do shorter exercises on days when you don't have time.

Okay, final question for this week. What should I do when I return? First off, you don't need to give your dog a treat, a food reward, because you are the reward. There is nothing, nothing more rewarding to a dog who doesn't like being alone than their owner coming back into the house. So you're already rewarding your dog massively when you come back. And adding treats to the mix

just is another thing to think about. I love rewards based training. I love it for every other type of dog training. It just doesn't work in separation anxiety. We don't need it. And sometimes it just makes things way more complicated. So when you come back, you are the treat. You are the reward. And how should you greet your dog when you come back? Just be normal.

Just be natural. Just be neutral. There's no evidence that ignoring your dog is going to help your dog feel better when being left. And in fact, if your dog's worried about being on its own and it needs you in its life, it needs you around to feel better, then ignoring him is punishing. It's just going to make him feel worse. We used to do this with kids, and we now know that ignoring kids when they need us is a really bad idea. It's not good parenting. Same with dogs. If they need us, we mustn't ignore them. So when you come back, interact. It's fine. Yeah, maybe don't come back and play a massive game of Tug or throw the ball in the hallway or anything like that. Nothing super, super exciting. But don't ignore your dog. Come back. Give him a near ruffle. And if you've got a dog who.

Does what we call excessive greeting, you should check my podcast on that, because that's a whole other thing we need to think about if we've got those dogs that are just so bouncy bouncy bouncy that they can't calm down when we get back. And by the way, that's not necessarily an indication that a dog is super, super stressed, because lots of dogs continue to be exuberant greeters well after they've got over their fear of being left. Anyway, when you return, come back. Just be normal. Don't overthink this one, but definitely don't ignore your dog.

All right, that's it for this set of questions, but tune in for the next episode. We're going to be talking about food. We're going to be talking about what if your dog follows? And we'll be looking at whether you should train and when you should train if your dog is a bit sleepy. All right, that's it from me for now. Thank you so much for tuning in. I look forward to catching you on the next episode.

Thank you so much for listening to this episode of the Be Right Back separation Anxiety podcast. If you want to find out more about how I can help you further, head over to [Julienasmith.com](http://Julienasmith.com). Meanwhile, if you enjoyed listening today, I would love it if you would head over to wherever you listen to your podcast and consider rating my show. Thanks so much. Good luck with that training, and bye for now.