

Be Right Back! Podcast with Julie Naismith

Episode 074 Transcript – How to Deal with Judgy Comments and Unhelpful Advice this Festive Season

<https://julienaismith.com/episode-74/>

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, my online programs, my trainer certification, and my 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.

Well, as we come up to the festive season, you're going to be spending more time with friends and family than you normally would. And I don't know about you, but one of the things that I always found was that as much as my nearest and dearest meant, well, it seems like everybody in your life becomes a dog expert when you've got a dog with a problem. Am I right? Does that feel like you and especially a dog with separation anxiety? That's why in this podcast episode, I want to go over some of the things that people are going to say to you in the next few weeks as you spend more time with them, doing family things, going to things with friends.

I want to cover the things that just come up over and over again. Now, we've all heard at some point and I also want to just give you some responses. You know what, you're not going to convince the people in your life that what you're doing with your dog and your dog separation anxiety is right. But equally, you don't need to get on the defensive about it. Because if you're working on a dog separation anxiety, if you're suspending absences and trying not to leave your dog as much as possible, if you're doing separation anxiety training, if you worked out that your dog has got panic disorder, all of those things, if you're doing those things, you have no need to be defensive. But you might find at times in the coming weeks that you're a little bit under attack.

So in order to help you defend yourself, not that you shouldn't need to defend yourself, but in order to help you just feel less under attack. Let's look at some of the things that I'm almost certain that someone is going to say to you, because these are the things that I've heard that all of my clients have heard, and it's almost like our friends and family just can't help saying these things.

So first of all, it's Thanksgiving or it's Christmas Day and you've got that big turkey meal and yeah, you want to be there, but I don't know, there's a dog that doesn't get on with your dog or there's a cat or there's some reason why you can't bring a dog. What's the betting that somebody's going to say to you, well, you know, it's such a big day and it's only a few hours. Surely you can just leave him just this once. It's only Christmas lunch. Well, yeah, your response inside, are you kidding me?

Here's the sort of thing I would say back to people, though. I would say something like, I know it can seem really silly that I can't leave him even just for lunch, but remember that I've told you before, if I let him go over his fear threshold, what's going to happen is he'll panic, and then he's going to have a setback, and it doesn't take long for him to get in a panic when I leave him. So I know that Christmas lunch doesn't seem like a long time to leave him, but for him, that's an eternity. And leaving him to panic is only just going to make my progress worse. So that I'm not going to be here for the next Christmas dinner. If I stick to the plan, I'm going to have more opportunities to do this kind of stuff with all of you, and then hopefully somebody will say to you, yeah, we'll bring your dog. It's going to be fine.

Another thing that somebody's going to say to you, almost inevitably, is, wow, he still doesn't have separation anxiety, does he? Really? Here's what I'd suggest you say back. I know it might seem that I've been working on this for a long time, but you've got to remember that what I'm working on, what we're working on in my dog, isn't just teaching him to sit. It's not just teaching him nice manners when he's on a leash. It's trying to change his really seriously messed up brain chemistry.

Separation anxiety isn't him being naughty, it's a really deep emotional trauma. It's at the same level as human PTSD. I know that might sound crazy, but it is. So can you see why I'm still working on it? Can you see why it's not something that can be quickly fixed?

And then there's the whole crating topic, which, if any of your friends or family is spending time on TikTok, they will be just thinking, Well, I saw something where some guy just created their dog and it was fine. So you might hear somebody say, well, why don't you just crate him? I saw the TikTok trainer do that and the dog was fixed instantly. So here's what you could say in response. Yeah, I know that might seem really obvious, and lots of people do talk about crating dogs, crating them when they have separation anxiety to make them suddenly get over it.

But the thing is, most dogs, the vast majority of dogs who hate being left alone, also absolutely detest and freak out when you put them in a crate. So it doesn't make them feel better about being left. Imagine if in the house was suddenly on fire now and we couldn't get out because the doors were locked. We'd be in a massive panic, wouldn't we? And it's the same with dogs who hate their crates, who've got a fear of being left. Not only are they now alone, and in the panic, but they're now locked into something that they can't get out of, so it doubles down on their panic.

And yeah, I know you've seen my dog wander into his crate when you've been around at mine, and he goes in there and he loves it, and he crawls into the snuggles, into the back, and he goes into his bed in the back of the crate. But that's his choice. And that's with the door open. I'm not closing the door. When a dog panics about being home alone. And you might have seen my dog do this when I showed you the videos, remember? Did you see my dog clearly not happy. When a dog who's really stressed about being left is put in a crate. All they want to do is then escape, and a really difficult topic.

I hope none of these topics come up, but I really worry if this topic comes up, there's a lot of press. It seems like all the time that it's all about you, that you're making your dog worse. So you might hear something like it's your anxiety. You are making your dog anxious because of your anxiety. Now, if you've got anxiety, you might respond by saying, you're right. I am anxious about my dog's condition. It's really horrible to think that he might be out of his mind with panic when I leave. And I am really stressed about doing the training.

It isn't easy. It takes a lot of time, and I want my life back, want my life back so I can spend more time with you guys. However, my anxiety is just my anxiety, you know, that about me. And there's no evidence to suggest that I'm causing my dog's anxiety. That's just talk that's out there, and it's really unhelpful. It's not helping me and it's not helping my dog. And the best thing I can do is just focus on helping him get over his anxiety so that this becomes just one less stressor in my life.

Then what about this one? This is such a common statement because it seems to be the kind of received wisdom about how we get dogs over separation anxiety. You just have to let him get on with it, right? You must have heard that. Just let him cry out, bark it out. I used to go out and leave my dog. My dog was fine. So some variation on that theme of just let him get on with it. And you could say, yeah, it's true. Lots of people do just leave their dogs. They're able to leave their dogs. They have no problem doing that. But what's going on with my dog isn't just two minutes of protest whining. It's way more than that.

It's what people who work with dogs with problem behaviors, vet behaviorists, for example, would call pathological. So it means it's beyond normal. What my dog does isn't just normal grumbles at being left. My dog is out of his mind with panic. If I let him get on with it, all that's going to do is make him way more panicked and then I'm just going to spend way more time training. So every dog is different. And all I can talk about is that for my dog, letting him get on with it is not the way to make things better.

And of course, you're trying to do all these things for your dog, which means that you're making sacrifices. You're maybe just doing 2 hours at Christmas lunch when everybody wants you to be there for the day. And you're doing it because you don't want your dog to be in a bad and a difficult and a panicky situation. So to outside people, it can look like your dog's controlling things. So you might hear, oh, you're letting your dog manipulate you. Here's what you could say in response to that. Well, it's true. I am letting my dog make some decisions. That is true.

I can't argue with that. But the reason that I'm letting my dog make some decisions and giving my dog choice is that when I leave him and give him no choice, he's in a blind panic. So if howling and whining is his way of telling me that he's in a panic, then I'm going to listen to that and I'm going to come back. That's not manipulation. That's a dog saying I'm panicky and I'm scared and I need you.

You know, think about a child who is genuinely freaked out by nightmares, wakes up in the middle of the night, absolutely out of its mind, out of his or her mind with worry. Parents go to a child

when a child is petrified like that. On other occasions, it's true, some children, as you know, will start to play little games. But dogs and children, dogs and people have a very different way of thinking. Dogs have a very simple way of looking at the world. And that is does this make my world better or doesn't make my world worse? So if my dog needs to bark and cry to get me back, I really don't want to leave him to bark and cry. But if that's what happens in the few minutes that I might be outside, I'm going to come back because he's telling me he can't cope. And that is fair enough.

And then the next thing so you're hanging out with people and maybe you brought your dog with you. And so your dog jumps up onto the sofa because you know what, dogs like to cuddle and you like to cuddle your dog and there's not, you know, you know that that is not why your dog's got separation anxiety. But I can guarantee you if somebody in your family sees that, there's a good chance that somebody's going to comment like this, oh, it's because you're letting your dog on the sofa.

Well, just remind them that if they don't know this already. Dogs just like to hang out with us. Sofas are comfortable. Sofas are kind of high up, so it gives dogs a good view of the room, and they are not being dominant. Sofas don't cause separation anxiety, and you can tell people that the research is concrete, that being letting a dog sleep on a bed or on a sofa is not what's causing your dog's separation anxiety.

Then there's a challenge that I think is really difficult to deal with emotionally. All of these challenges are difficult emotionally because there's a hint that you're not thinking of others, you're just thinking of your dog. But ultimately, you might get that outright statement. What you're doing, you might hear somebody say, is, you're choosing us over your dog here.

What you can do is just remind people that your dog does have needs. You're not choosing between them or your dog. What you're trying to do is get your dog to a stage and a state that your dog is okay and can be left so that you can spend more time with your friends and family. You're doing this so that you can spend more time with them, so that you can choose to be with them. And right now, this is just something that you have to go through.

I'm sounding like it's all going to be gloom and doom. You know it won't. It's a great opportunity for you to have maybe really positive conversations with friends and family about your dog separations. Not everybody judges. Not everybody who does judge judges all the time. So I don't want to worry you unnecessarily. All I'm saying is that it is good to be prepared. You might have a few of these comments coming your way, so just think through how you're going to deal with them.

But above all, have a wonderful, festive season. And when it comes to the new year, let's chat about getting your training really, really solid and on track. Thanks so much for listening, and I'll catch you on the next one. Bye for now.

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](https://julienasmith.com). Meanwhile, if you enjoyed listening today, I would love it if you would head over to wherever you listen to your podcasts and consider rating my show. Thanks so much. Good luck with that training, and bye for now.