

# Be Right Back! Podcast with Julie Naismith

## Episode 078 Transcript – Why it's Not Your Fault - Or Your Dog's Fault Either

<https://julienaismith.com/episode-78/>

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.

Now, if you follow me at all, you've listened to my podcast, or maybe you've read my book, or maybe you've seen some of my posts on social media, it would be highly unlikely that you would have missed me saying something that I say over and over again. You did not cause your dog's separation anxiety.

I don't know how many times I've said that, and I will not stop saying it because it really matters that you understand that. If I get repetitive about it, please forgive me. The reason I repeat it is that I want everyone to know and I want everyone to believe it. I want you in your heart to know that that's the case. You didn't cause your separation, your dog's separation anxiety.

Do we know what did? Yeah, there are many factors. It's one of those things that there are different things that could contribute. So the prime suspects are stuff that happened to your dog when it was a puppy, stuff that happened to your dog when it was being carried by the dam, genetics, things that happened to your puppy at seven weeks old, perhaps, or things that did happen later in life. So there are lots and lots and lots of factors that can contribute. And the only way that you could be held accountable is if you got this perfectly formed puppy or dog and you knew for certain that there was no way that your puppy or dog could have separation anxiety. And by the way, you can adopt a puppy or dog with what seems like absolutely no issue with home alone behavior. And they can develop it. They can develop it regardless of what you do, because they can just be hardwired be on a track to develop separation anxiety.

So the only way that I could hold you accountable for your dog's separation anxiety is if you came to me and you said, my dog gets really upset when I leave, what can I do about it? And you totally ignored every bit of advice, or you went to another trainer and you totally ignored every bit of advice there. Now, the thing is, most of you don't, most of you are doing absolutely everything you can to get your dog over separation anxiety. Can you see how if there's a multitude of different factors that can affect the likelihood that your puppy or dog will get separation anxiety? And if you're doing everything you can, or even if you're doing enough, it's not your fault. Okay?

So I really think it's important that you let go of your guilt. Now, one thing, maybe this is the other side to the coin, perhaps that's not the right way of saying it, but it's also not your dog's fault. So if you think about it, there's lots of reasons why dogs develop fear and why they develop separation anxiety. But the reason that your life has been turned upside down, it's not your dog's fault either.

But I've been where you are and I really understand how much judgment you have to deal with the guilt that we end up carrying, because it doesn't really matter, does it? How many times I tell you you didn't cause your dog separation anxiety. My suspicion is there's probably a tiny, tiny little voice still somewhere. Maybe not so tiny, maybe it's very loud, still saying, yeah, well, maybe I'm not doing enough. Maybe that time when I could have got back earlier than I did. Maybe I could have not had a COVID puppy, maybe. And that's a problem, isn't it? We're really, really good at judging ourselves. But the more you say it, the more I hope you hear me say it, the more I hope you'll truly start to believe that it's not your fault.

But let's go back to that point about it not being our dog's fault either. And what prompts me to say that is that earlier this week, I posted up a comment in one of my Facebook groups and it went like this you know you have a dog with separation anxiety, fill in the blanks. I was just really curious to see if separation anxiety or having a dog with separation anxiety was affecting all of us in the same way or in different ways, or just where people were coming from. And there was an outpouring, an absolute torrent of comments, very emotional, as you'd expect. I mean, if somebody asked me that question when Percy had separation anxiety, I mean, hold me back, I would have had a lot to say.

The themes that came up over and over again, it was about not having a life, not having that, just like come and go, do as you want kind of easiness that normal inverted commas people have having. Relationships that are affected by having a dog with separation anxiety, because the people that are nearest and dearest to us, even our other halves, sometimes don't understand what's going on with our dog, why we might suspend our lives so that we can help our dog get over separation anxiety. So tensions with our other halves, tensions with family, tensions with friends.

People talked about getting into debt, getting into debt just for their dog, because they know that they don't want to leave their dog. And that means forking out for expensive daycare. I mean, if you've ever paid for monthly daycare, I still can see the number on my credit card statement and it makes me wince now. So kudos to you if you're doing that. And you know what? In this day and age, when the cost of living is crazy, finding money to get your dog to daycare is an enormous feat. And don't feel bad if you can't find the money to send your dog to daycare. I mean, let's face it, it's a lot of money to do that five days a week. And that came in. That sort of theme continued.

And people sounded really miserable in this post to the extent that I thought, oh, what did I do that for? But I did want people to be able to say how this was affecting them. And I did want other commenters to understand that, oh, wow, yeah, it's not just me. I'm not the only one who's just had

a row with my husband about our dog separation anxiety. Or, oh, I'm not the only one who's looking at my bank balance and the credit card bill and trying to work out what can I not spend.

Money in order that I can get somebody to look after my dog. So I thought it was really helpful for people to understand that they weren't alone. And that certainly is something that everyone was saying. It was good to know they weren't the only one facing these struggles, because having a dog with separation anxiety is bad enough, but then the impact on your life is enormous. So the big theme seemed to be lack of control. So if I had to sum it all up, it's lack of control. And we know from research, in psychological research, that when people don't have control, it is a cause of misery and depression. So no wonder then that so many people are struggling because they can't make the choices they used to make.

I felt so sad for everyone. It also took me back. It took me back to that time of feeling isolated, feeling cut off from people, because if the dog couldn't come, I couldn't come. Or if I couldn't find anybody to have the dog, I couldn't come. Feeling like people just thought I was a bit crazy because, like, who turns down an invitation to, you know, an amazing dinner because your dog can't come? Who says that? Yeah, it's not what most people say. And also just getting tired of explaining, tired of people forgetting that this is what I was trying to do. I was trying to get my dog over separation anxiety so that I could get my life back, so that I could do those things again.

And reading all of your comments took me back, but also just made me so sad for all of you who are dealing with it now. But then in the middle of those comments, there was this that Samantha wrote and she said, but it's not my dog's fault. He didn't ask her to come and live with us, she said, and he didn't mean to turn my family's life upside down.

There I am worrying about everybody in the post. But also, Samantha is reminding us, all of us, that it is absolutely okay to feel bad about the situation we are in. We are human. And I don't want any of you to go around saying, oh, but it's not that bad, but it's not awful. It is. It can be really bad. It can be really bad when you have a dog with separation anxiety. What Samantha did was she reminded us that our dogs are having a bad time, too.

Actually, most of them aren't because if you're listening to this podcast, chances are you're somebody who's going out of your way to stop your dog being alone. And when your dog isn't alone, more often than not, they're okay. Now, there are dogs who are so focused and so fixed on their one or two people that when they are with somebody else, they suffer. But for a lot of dogs, just being with somebody else is enough. So they aren't suffering in the way that you are. But equally, as Samantha reminds us, we're not suffering because of something our dog did.

It is not their fault that our lives are in this chaos and this state of lack of control and feeling like we're never, ever going to get back to doing what we used to do. And the reason it's not our dog's fault is, as Samantha said, we made the decision, didn't we? We made the decision to if you think about it at a high level, we made the decision to domesticate dogs, and we made the decision to

bring dogs into our world to get them to come and live with us, which actually is a really unnatural thing. The real killer for dogs is that for the last 30,000 years, we've selected dogs over and over and over. We selected the dogs that most want to be with us. That's how dogs ended up being so domesticated and so sociable. Because the dogs that first wandered into the caves 30,000 years ago looking for food scraps, the ones that showed most affiliation to us, we fed more. The ones that liked us more got more scraps. And that got repeated over and over and over.

So now we breed dogs who look like babies. They've got cute faces and big eyes because that makes us feel all warm and fuzzy. We love dogs that approach us with a waggly tail, so we're more likely to select those dogs to be bred. And over and over and over, over the years, over the generations, over the 30,000 years that dogs have been in our lives, we've chosen the dogs who most want to be with us. So no wonder then, that they freak out when we're not around. I mean, actually, if the statistics are true, and I've no reason to doubt that, there are probably around 20% to 25% of dogs who suffer with being home alone. Actually, when you think about it, the way we've selected dogs over the thousands of years, it's amazing that more of them don't have a problem with being left.

Actually, studies do show that even if dogs don't have separation anxiety when we leave, plenty of dogs don't like it when we leave, which isn't really a surprise at all, is it? They like company, they're used to company, and they just want us to be around. We make the decision that they have to spend time alone with us. Now, of course, if a dog is going to live in our world, the reality of it is, for the vast majority of us, we aren't going to spend 24/7 with our dogs. I often hear people say, oh, it's all right for retirees because they can be there for their dogs all the time. Well, guess what? Not necessarily. In fact, not at all. They may not be going to work, but people need lives too. I mean, we know after COVID, don't we, after the pandemic, the impact of isolation and what that has on our mental health. So as much as yeah, I have met many retirees who do spend a lot of time with their dog because they can, with their separation anxiety, dog because they can, they're desperate for community and contact and socialization again, because it's really important for mental health.

So they feel isolated because having a dog with separation anxiety impacts them too. So there isn't that unicorn pet parent, that unicorn guardian out there who can be with their dog 24/7. It's not that there are some people whose lifestyles are totally suited to having a dog with separation anxiety. I'm not going to argue that there are some people whose lives are better suited. It's harder for some people than others. I'm not going to debate that. There isn't anybody whose life isn't affected, though, when they have a dog with separation anxiety.

And if we're going to have them in our lives, we've invited them into our homes, they need to be able to cope with some time alone. That's the reality of being a dog. What we do with home alone training is we help dogs deal with that weirdness of not having their people around when actually companionship is really important and, for some dogs, really scary when they don't have it. So our dogs really are the innocent.

Party in all of this, and here's four reasons why.

So, reason one, and I just expanded on it, dogs aren't designed to be alone. We've picked the ones that want to be with us. Dogs are sociable by design, then two. As much as it can seem that they do, dogs don't do spite. You might think that when you come back and your shoes have been chewed. The back of the heel has been ripped by little needle teeth. You might think that when you see your dog and they have that kind of slinky look, that they feel guilty and they've got to your best shoes in spite. They did it to get back at you. But the thing about dogs is, unlike humans, they don't do spite, they don't act in a Machiavellian way. They aren't nasty and scheming. They leave that all to us humans. Dogs just do what works for dogs.

So if your shoes got chewed by your dog, it's not that your dog's mad at you for going out, they're doing it because chewing shoes makes them feel better when you're gone. It's either relieving some boredom or it's helping them feel less stressed. They're not doing it thinking, I'm going to show you every time you go out, I'm going to get your most precious stuff and I'm going to destroy it. They're not thinking like that. They are innocent and not spiteful.

Number three, they aren't manipulating us. I promise you, your dog is not playing you again. Those are human concepts. In order to manipulate, in order to think about how to get back at somebody, dogs have to have an understanding of the impact of their consequences on how we feel. And as far as we know, as far as we can tell from all the research that's been done into dog cognition, when they do something at a certain point in time, they are not anticipating the impact that will have on our thinking or our emotion. In order to manipulate, that's what you need to be thinking, right? So if I do this, that's what's going to happen to you. Plus manipulation is it goes back to that kind of bad intentions and maliciousness that I talked about in .2. And dogs don't do that. They are just trying to do what works for them. And that's a key point. Number four, when they do things, they are just trying to make the world less scary and better for them.

So if your dog barks constantly while you're gone, they're not doing it to scheme. They're not doing it because ha. I've worked out that I don't want her to go out so I'm going to bark. I just don't want her to go. It's not like it has any impact on me but hey, I'm just going to be really naughty and I'm going to bark. If your dog is barking and barking and barking when you go, that's your dog calling 911. They're scared, they're in a panic and they're picking up the phone to you and saying, come back. I am scared. So yes. Do they work out that if they bark, you come back? Yeah. But that's not manipulating you. That's them trying to make things less scary. That's them trying to say, I need you, please come back. So of course they're going to bark. Because if I need help, if I need an ambulance, I'm going to call 911. I'm going to learn that that's the right way to get instant medical help. If I can't get to the hospital, dogs learn in the same way, but it's not manipulation. It's just crying for help.

So considering all of this, everything that you're going through, the impact that having a dog with separation anxiety has on your life, I do want you to step back. If you haven't thought about this,

and many of you have, and just remember that it isn't your dog's fault. And you can do that whilst at the same time feeling bad for yourself. It's okay. You absolutely have every right to feel pretty crappy about the situation that you're in. You are human. Your life has been turned upside down. And you're struggling, and it's not incompatible with saying, but it's also not my dog's fault. And in fact, I know many of you do say that, and I know many of you do think that, too. As much as you're suffering, too, you know that the choice is that you change. You change your life, or your dog suffers. And on behalf of your dog, I can't tell you how grateful I am for everything that you do for your dog.

You are making a selfless decision to consider your dog's needs. You could just leave your dog day after day after day, but you're not doing that. And you know what? That's why your life is difficult, because you're doing the right thing by your dog. And I am so grateful to you for that. And hopefully, by reminding ourselves that it's not our dog's fault that they're not doing this just to make life difficult for us, maybe that can actually add to our resolve, the extra resolve that we definitely need if we're ever going to work through the training and get our dogs over this.

You know those times when you just think, I can't do this anymore. I am just done, and you just look at their faces and you realize that, yeah, I know, I know. You're not doing this to me. You're doing this because you're a dog. You're not doing this to be mean. That extra bit of resolve hopefully keeps you going, because I promise you, your dog wants to be okay on his own every bit as much as you do. So stick with the training, and if you ever need any help, you know where to find me. Meanwhile, thanks 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.