

Be Right Back! Podcast with Julie Naismith

Episode 086 Transcript – Smug People and their Perfect Dogs_ How to Not Let Them Make You Feel Like a Failure

<https://julienaismith.com/episode-086/>

As I often am with these podcasts, I'm inspired by the amazing people that I get to work with, the amazing clients in my separation anxiety heroes group. And just very recently, last week, there was a conversation about smug people, about smug other people. Do you know what I mean? If you've got a dog with separation anxiety, which I guess is why you're listening to this podcast, but do you know what I mean about those people?

Typically, we're talking about the people who have the perfect dog, and in particular, people who have the perfect dog that is perfectly okay on their own and that has always been perfectly okay on their own. And the people who, because they have this perfect dog, think that you are a disaster as an owner and think that what on earth is going on with your dog? Why haven't you got this separation anxiety thing under control yet? Well, this conversation went on in my group the other day and I just had so much empathy for what people were saying because I have so been there too.

So in this podcast episode, we're going to talk about what happens when that conversation comes up. What are the typical things that people always say that kind of just makes you go, you know what I mean? And what can you do about it? Because it will happen. You will meet these people, they will have their opinions. Now, I don't know about you, but one of the things, one of the things that people used to say to me that I found most triggering when Percy had separation anxiety was we never had any issues with our dog.

Yeah. Ever had that said to you? Of course you have, because people say it all the time, right? And let's face it, if you've never had a dog with separation anxiety, you're going to think that. You're going to think that. Well, goodness me, I do not know why she's struggling with her dog, because, well, we just got our dog and then two days later we were out and doing our thing. And because the reality is that most dogs don't have a problem with being home alone. Well, at least they don't develop a full blown anxiety and panic response to being left. So of course, the majority of people with a dog think that those of us who have a dog with separation anxiety are either a bit crazy or we're doing something wrong or we're babying our dog, et cetera, et cetera, you know what I'm saying? I don't need to fill in the blanks. You've heard it all before.

But they got lucky. They got lucky because most dogs don't develop separation anxiety. And by the way, before you start thinking, oh yeah, okay, because they did something differently, no, it's not like that. There are many reasons why dogs can develop separation anxiety. And just because you have a friend whose dog was fine on their own from the moment that dog came home. It doesn't

mean to say they did it all right, and you did it all wrong. There are so many things that can contribute to dogs developing fear, and lots of those things can be stuff that happened way before you even thought about getting the dog you got. So that's why I say that all those people who go on about, I never had a problem leaving my dog, they're just the lucky ones.

They didn't go what we've gone through, because they just lucked out and got the dog who was fine, right? And those of us, the 25% of people, because we reckon there's about 20% to 25% of the dog population suffer from home alone problems. Those of us in that minority, we just got a tougher gig. We got these adorable dogs, but they ended up being dogs that we can't leave. And it's not something that you did, so it's not they did it all right and you did it all wrong. They just lucked out. And because of that, because they don't understand what you've been through, and because most dogs do just tolerate being alone, with most dogs, we do get lucky. We don't have to do anything to teach them to be home alone. They just get on with it.

So because the majority of people are in that position, they look at us like we are yeah, like I say, we're not doing it right or we are crazy or something. Something. And the top three things that they say along the lines of we never had any issues with our dog. The top three things that I hear people complain about all the time when when my fabulous clients are feeling kind of got at and feeling under attack, the most common statements that they report back is that they'll have had a friend who said, well, we never had a problem from day one. We could always leave our dog. Or the other thing that people will say, the second thing I hear reported back is, what do you mean? What do you mean you still can't leave your dog? Roll of eyes. Oh, my goodness. Last time we met up for a coffee, because I don't see you anymore these days, by the way, because you've got a dog you can't leave.

But last time we did manage to meet up for a coffee, you were going on about doing getting your dog to be home alone and okay, then. So, I mean, my goodness, are you still and massive emphasis on the word still, right? You still can't leave your dog. And then linked to that number three comes the but I thought you were doing some sort of training, weren't you? Well, how come if you started this training, why has that worked? I mean, way to make us feel inadequate. Right? I used to feel like I was the biggest failure that yeah, it was me. It was either me because I caused it, which now I know I didn't, or it was me because I couldn't fix it. So either way, everybody else is living their happy, normal lives with their dogs, and I'm just making a complete hash of it. And I don't know, maybe you're feeling that way, too. Maybe you're feeling inadequate or maybe you're feeling like a failure.

One thing that gave me a tiny bit of glimmer of hope, which is also, in a way, why I got into this whole training thing twelve years ago, was I had a dog, India, who had no issues with being left. She was one of those dogs. She was one of those dogs that smug people talk about. I didn't need to do anything with her for her to be okay on her own. So, yes, I lucked out with her, but she made me realize that I wasn't doing anything different with her. I didn't do anything different with her that I did with Percy. So it was like, oh, wait a minute, okay, so that was great because that got me into

this whole thing of, oh, wait a minute, there's something different going on here, thank goodness, because I probably just would have stayed in that horrible place of it is me. But no, I didn't do anything different with her.

He developed separation anxiety. She's the dog that all your friends who are being smug, she's one of their dogs. But those three things can be so triggering, can't they? We didn't have to leave our dog, we didn't have to do anything special. What do you mean you still can't leave them? And oh, training, this training, why is this training is not working, obviously. And so, like I say, if you are feeling inadequate, if you are feeling like you're just messing this up, I need you to know that you aren't inadequate, you aren't messing up and you're not a failure. It's just people's opinions about what we're doing. And gosh, when you have a dog, everybody's got an opinion, especially other people with dogs. And why? Why do people end up being so opinionated? Well, I always like to think, I always like to come from a place of humanity and empathy and think, well, maybe there are reasons why our friends and family are so opinionated about our dogs, is because they care.

And I do think that is a driver. I do think that our friends and family care. They want us to have a dog who doesn't quite disrupt our lives in the way that it does, and they can see the anguish that we're going through. So I think they do care, and I think those opinions come from a place of caring. But then I do also think there's a little bit of there are some people who it's just that they don't get it and they never will. They're totally bemused by what we're doing because they got the dogs that they were lucky with. The majority of people, as I say, don't ever have to do this stuff. And they're in that camp and so they just think it's completely bonkers.

They have no comprehension of what we're going through. Their dogs just didn't need what we ended up doing with our dogs. And then a third thing, I think, with this opinion, and that's what I want to dive into a little bit today, this third driver of why people can be so opinionated is their dogs do have issues. They do have problems, but they are masking them or not masking them, but people don't want to talk about their dog's problems. When you have a dog with separation anxiety, it's a very obvious problem in that you're turning down invitations, you can't go anywhere, you aren't socializing like you used to, you're stuck inside, you're complaining about not going to the gym. So it's quite a public condition. It's not a condition, it's not a behavior problem that you can easily pretend isn't there. And so I wonder sometimes when people get really opinionated about our dog's separation anxiety, that their dogs may have issues that they feel bad about, but it's deflection makes them feel better.

I hate to say this, but sometimes people feel better about themselves when they make other people feel worse about themselves, which isn't very nice, but it's a classic social media thing, right? Isn't it? We all feel a little bit better when we see other people aren't doing as brilliantly as we think they are. But anyway, what can you do? What can you do? Because this will happen. You will get these comments and you will be left feeling inadequate by the smile. Gonas. Well, my top three things I do, like threes. I feel like today's episode is all about the threes, but it all seemed to be about threes. So let's talk about the three things that you can do. Number one, and I cannot

emphasize this enough, it's so critical that you must not compare your reality so the day to day reality of the life you live with your dog, you must not compare your reality with the front that people put on the front that people put on and present to the world, right? Because your reality is warts and all, you know, the ins and outs of every issue that you have with your dog and all the problems that ensue as a result of not having a dog you can leave, you know, all of that, but you might show some of that to the world, but maybe not all of it.

And remember, especially on social media, people like to present the best of themselves. They're presenting the Instagram reality, not the actual reality. So you compare your reality, which is an internal state, and your reality is full and it's present and it's like detailed and yeah, you live it every single day. You're comparing that to the image that people want you to buy into. I'm not saying that your friends have dogs with separation anxiety and they're covering it up and they're just pretending they have a dog they can leave. Although I do think that some people are in denial about separation anxiety, so they don't always want to admit that they have problems leaving their dog or they're in denial about it themselves. But I'm not saying that everybody who kind of rolls their eyes that your dog's, separation anxiety, secretly has a dog they can't leave. I'm not saying that.

But what I do know is that people don't have perfect dogs. I joke a little bit about my dog, India, because she has been a very, very easy dog. And I feel like everybody at some point in their lives should live with a dog like India, because she does make having a dog in your life feel really easy, but she does stuff too. And so remember, when people are posting pictures of their beautifully behaved dog, who doesn't have any issues at daycare, who loves everybody, who can be left alone without any problems, who is a joy at the park and loves kids, there will be something, there will be something about their dog that isn't 100% perfect. Because dogs aren't robots. They're living sentient beings. And just like us, they have their little quirks and their little foibles. So nobody has a perfect dog.

And social media is all about you seeing what other people want you to see. So please remember that they aren't talking about their perfect dogs, or when they are talking about their perfect dogs, that perfect dog doesn't really exist. Okay, number two, if you're thinking about someone else who's got a dog with separation anxiety. So let's change it a little bit because I think sometimes what we can do is we can look at people who have had a dog with separation anxiety and think, oh, well, it's fine for them. Maybe you think that about me sometimes because I'm always going on about how I love just being able to leave Percy and it feels so chill. If you are thinking about that and comparing yourselves to people who can now leave their dogs, if that makes you feel like a failure or inadequate, you've got to stop that comparison too. So in the first point, we're comparing our imperfect dog with separation anxiety with the supposedly perfect dogs that we see our friends post about on Instagram. This point is me saying, don't compare yourself to somebody else whose dog is now over separation anxiety, because that is just going to make you feel flat too.

I want you to look at those dogs and feel happy and excited about the possibility that that could be your dog one day too. What you must never do is compare your start so where you are with your dog in the training, in the separation anxiety training, whether you're at the start or on the journey. I don't want you to compare your current position at the start or the middle with somebody else's end because it's not the right comparison to make. Every single person who's got their dog over separation anxiety has been where you are right now. Whether you're starting right at the beginning with my door is a bore exercise, and you're still doing that whether you're on seconds, whether you're on minutes. The people who can now leave their dog for 2 hours or 3 hours, they were where you are at some point in their journey. So that comparison is completely flawed because you're comparing your place or where you are on your journey with the end of their journey, and it's not an appropriate comparison to make. Okay, number three, see if you can find someone who does really understand.

Now, ideally, that could be a friend. Is there somebody that you chat to at the park or someone who goes to the same daycare as you who has a dog and you know that they're taking them to daycare because they can't leave their dog either? I just want you to find see if you can find in your circle just one person whose dog either currently has separation anxiety or they've been through this too. Now, it's kind of weird because there are many dogs out there with separation anxiety.

There really are, but sometimes it's not one of those things that connects us with other people. I know I felt like I was literally the only person in the world with separation anxiety, but that was pre Facebook groups and Instagram posts and before yeah, so it was different. Wasn't that long ago, but it feels like a different world. So even if you can't find somebody in your circle of friends or acquaintances who has a dog with separation anxiety, there are plenty of opportunities online now to chat to people who are going through what you're going through. If you haven't done already, you must, must join my dog separation anxiety support group on Facebook.

I know not everybody loves being on Facebook these days. However, I don't know about you, I do enjoy being in dog groups because they feel positive. And if you are in my dog separation anxiety support group, you'll know how much effort we put into keeping that group positive. And I'll put the link in the show notes for this episode. So if you can't find somebody in real life, then see if you can find somebody virtually that you can connect with. Because the biggest problem with all of this kind of thinking that other people are smug about their dog or that they judge you or that they make you feel inadequate is they just don't get it. And when you do find someone who gets it, it feels like a massive weight has just lifted. And just to finish, I want to tell you, and I can't tell you this enough.

You are doing the right thing. Even just listening to this podcast means that you are thinking about trying to do the right thing by you and your dog, then that's amazing. It's amazing that you're committed to getting your dog over this. It's amazing that you've even recognized that your dog is going through this, because so many people are in denial about it. And when these comments come, when it feels like everybody around you is being smug, just remember, until you've gone

through this, it is really hard for people to get what separation anxiety is all about, why we need to do the training, and why it can be so hard. So if you only do one thing, find a friend who understands. All right, that's it from me for this episode. Thank you again for tuning in.

I know you have lots of options, and I really appreciate you taking the time to listen. I look forward to catching you on the next one.