



# PARKSIDE

## CLIENT INFORMATION HANDOUT

### **DOGS THAT DESTROY WHEN ALONE**

Adult dogs exhibit a number of problem behaviours when distressed by separation from their owners, the most common and actionable being destructiveness. Chewing, scratching or digging when away from the owner must be distinguished from similar activities of the puppy or accompanied adult dog. A quite different approach to treatment is required for the latter. The prospects for resolving or easing these separation problems are quite favourable if a logical rather than an emotional approach is adopted.

The lonely, destructive dog is usually a most lovely and loved pet who tried to spend every moment in human company. The general relationship between dog and family has to be changed from clinging and indulgent to an independent even cool style. Destructive tendencies are not modified by punishment on reunion or by assertiveness obedience training. Indeed our evidence suggests that excessive punishment of juvenile dogs for toileting and other minor misdemeanours strongly predisposes the adult to separation problems. Insecurity rather than malice provokes panic of which howling, loss of accustomed toilet control and destructiveness is the symptoms.

### **TREATMENT**

There are two main aspects to overcoming this problem in the short term: in the short term property must be protected, but thereafter a less attached dog-human relationship is required. The treatment plan given below is of general relevance to most separation problems, individual cases may be more or less complex and treatment tailored accordingly.

1. Environmental – short term can the dog be excluded from items of value e.g. to a kennel (indoors or out), garage or porch? Do not release to the garden or street.
2. Pre-separation – whilst destructive dogs are rarely 'bored' dogs, their needs for exercise, interest and food must be satisfied. A long walk including off-leash play with other dogs is essential followed by half or more of the daily food ration. Satiety provokes sleep.
3. Separation – the relationship during the time immediately prior to departure must be especially off hand, even rejecting. Loving departures contrast the desolation of being alone, so be cool instead. Vary the routine and time of departures.
4. Comforters – things should be as pleasant as possible for the dog when alone, with physical, chemical and audio reminders of the human companions. Thus ideally the dog will be given the run of the house, garden and even the bedroom. It may panic when restricted to the kitchen or kennel (but see 1 above) but relax when all doors are open. Leave the radio or TV on, even a recording of familiar human voices. Allow to lie on worn items of the owners clothing. Leave with palatable chews and favourite toys.
5. Reunions – dogs usually look pleased when their owners return, but destructive dogs may wear an expression of 'guilt'. DO NOT PUNISH. Always be loving on arrival home.
6. Emotional – the hardest and most important part of overcoming separation problems is to develop a cooler, more independent relationship. Specifically less time in contact e.g.30% of time separated by a door, less verbal and physical affection. Ideally the dog will develop new expectations from a combination of cool departures and warm reunions.

7. Drugs – in a few cases and as a last resort, the behavioural approach may be introduced or combined with mild sedation such as from Valium or Chlorpromazine.

Some owners may decide that the price, financial and emotional of curing the destructiveness dog is too high. What other options are available? One can stay home, hire a dog sitter, short term board or just put up with the problem. Too many owners re-home or reject the dog and thereby pass the problem on to someone else. **DO NOT DO THAT**, give your veterinarian a call for a detailed individual consultation.

Extracted from an article by Dr. R.A. Mugford April 1985

Here at Parkside we have our own behavioural specialist Mandi Hird – our vets will refer you to Mandi for a one-to-one consultation.

## *PARKSIDE – a lifetime of caring*

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