

GOOD HOUSEKEEPING

Delicious Harvest Meals



GOOD
HOUSEKEEPING
MAGAZINE

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(Getty Images.)

FAMILY + PETS LIFE WITH PETS

SEPARATION ANXIETY IS REAL

If a new routine has you out of the house more often, your four-legged friend may be feeling stressed and lonely. Here's how to deal with it.

As the recipient of endless hours of attention over the past few months, your pet may be the only member of the family who actually *enjoyed* quarantine. Now, with some businesses and schools open, your dog or cat may start to experience fear, anxiety

and stress (FAS)—signs include aggressive or erratic behavior; urinating in the house and panting, pacing or whining for dogs; and excessive grooming, hiding or yowling for cats. If you notice unusual behavior, first take your pet to the vet to rule out anything physical, says fear-free certified animal behaviorist Lisa Radosta, D.V.M., DACVB. If the all clear is given, try these approaches to ease stress.

KEEP THEM BUSY. A tired dog is a happy dog, explains Colleen Demling-Riley, a canine behaviorist at Dogtopia. A long walk, a trip to the dog park or a rousing game of fetch before you leave can help mitigate FAS-based behaviors. Leaving them with a puzzle or a treatstuffed toy can also keep their brain engaged so they'll hardly notice you've left. Playing with cats when they seem stressed can help as well.

COME AND GO CALMLY. If you turn your arrivals and departures into big productions, your dog will think of them that way too. Instead, briefly pet them and say "I'll be back soon" in a level voice before you leave, advises Demling-Riley. And don't indulge their excitement when you return—ignoring their

antics then will signal that your reappearance is nothing to get worked up about. Make sure to pet and praise them once they calm down.

CREATE A SAFE SPACE. Pets who get stressed about loud noises, ringing of the doorbell or a change in routine can benefit from a room of their own. Give them a sanctuary space, like a crate or a corner with a comfy bed and favorite toys, says Radosa. At high-stress times like Halloween night and when thunderstorms are raging, put your dog or cat in their safe spot with a puzzle toy or special treats and add some white or brown noise, such as from the TV, to keep them distracted. Consider crate training dogs before leaving them home alone.

DESENSITIZE THEM TO TRIGGERS. You can train your dog not to flip out when the doorbell rings, says Kristen Levine, a pet expert and the creator of the pet parenting platform Pet Living. Ask your pet to sit, then have a friend ring the bell. Give your pup a treat after the bell rings so they'll associate the noise with good things and learn to sit instead of bark at a loud sound. If your dog does bark, reward them only after

they've quieted down. Repeat for just five to 10 minutes at a stretch to keep your dog engaged and your neighbors happy. You can also train a pet to go sit on their bed when someone rings or knocks, letting you accept deliveries without fearing that they'll escape.

CONSIDER MEDICATION. Deeply rooted fears or triggers you can't easily simulate, like thunderstorms and vet visits, may call for more dedicated treatment. Levine uses the FDA-approved medication Sileo to treat her dog's noise aversion during stressful times such as Halloween, with its frequent doorbell ringing and noisy parties. Radosta and Demling-Riley both note that pets may need outside help for more severe cases of FAS. Consult your vet to determine whether medication or training by a certified behaviorist can help. ■