

Bad Dog Or Medical Condition?

Vets say changes in a dog's behavior could be the result of separation anxiety. If your dog has soiled your new carpet, attacked the door molding or shredded your favorite pair of shoes, he has likely been in the doghouse-figuratively.

But this behavior may not be a case of a good dog gone bad. It could be separation anxiety, an underdiagnosed and undertreated condition in which animals become so upset by their owner's departure they resort to what is considered bad behavior to cope with the situation. It is estimated that up to 17 percent of all dogs in the U.S. may show signs of separation anxiety.

Separation anxiety is usually triggered when the owner leaves or shortly after. Because dogs are historically pack animals, the dog views the family as its pack and experiences distress when separated from that family. That stress leads to problem behaviors, including:

- ◆ Excessive barking, whining, howling
- ◆ Destruction, chewing, clawing or digging
- ◆ Urinary or bowel accidents indoors
- ◆ Depression/inactivity
- ◆ Constant pacing, circling
- ◆ Excessive licking, drooling

Separation anxiety is a treatable condition. New medications have been introduced recently to help ease the pain of separation anxiety for dogs and their owners. Most veterinarians choose to use a combination of medication and behavior modification training, which offers the best chance of success in managing separation anxiety.

If your dog's "bad behavior" sounds more like separation anxiety, talk to your veterinarian for diagnosis and treatment. After all, wouldn't it be nice to know that your "bad" dog isn't so bad after all, just misunderstood?

—NAPS