Alone at Home

Separation Anxiety

A gentle, force-free plan for apartment dogs with separation anxiety: week-one damage control, a 4-week foundation, and a clear path for the months after

Casa Scripta, Edition 1, November 2026.

PLEASE READ THIS FIRST

Not veterinary advice

> **Not veterinary advice. General information only. Talk to your vet or a qualified behavior professional about your dog.**

Contents

Not veterinary advice iii

Important: please read first 5

How to use this book (in 10 minutes) 6

- Who this book is for, and who it isn't 7
- Your week-one job 8
- Your cover plan 8

Chapter 1. Your dog isn't being spiteful, and you're not a bad owner 11

Chapter 2. What's really going on when you leave 14

Chapter 3. Red flags: see your vet first 19

Chapter 4. Week 1: Damage control 21

- 4.1 The no-panic rule: never leave your dog alone longer than they can cope with 21
- 4.2 Film your dog (step 2) 22
- 4.3 Neighbors, landlords, building managers, HOAs and strata 25
- 4.4 Quick fixes for outside-noise barking 28

Chapter 5. The 4-week foundation plan at a glance 29

Chapter 6. Weeks 1 to 2: Find your starting line 31

Chapter 7. Weeks 2 to 4: Build, one step at a time 37

Chapter 8. After week 4: the months ahead 41

Chapter 9. Myth-busters 46

Chapter 10. Looking after you 48

Chapter 11. Where to get help 49

A final word 50

Disclaimer 51

References 52

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Important: please read first

This book is general information, not veterinary or legal advice. It doesn't replace advice from your vet or a qualified behavior professional, who can actually meet your dog. If you're worried about your dog's health or safety, contact your vet.

See a vet before you start if your dog hurts themselves trying to get out (broken teeth, torn nails, cut paws or mouth), tries to escape, won't eat or drink when alone, has accidents in the house, changes suddenly (especially an older dog), or shows signs of pain such as limping or stiffness (ASPCA; Dogs Trust; Mills et al. 2020). The full checklist is in Chapter 3. In an emergency, contact your nearest emergency vet.

What this book is. I help apartment dog owners whose dog howls the moment they leave, and whose neighbors have started complaining, get through the crisis with a week-one damage-control plan, then start building calm alone time with a gentle, force-free 4-week foundation plan, and a clear path for the months after. **Results vary; many dogs need months.**

A plan, not a promise. Four weeks is the length of the foundation plan, not a result. In the research, owner-led training was usually measured over 8 to 12 weeks, and specialists talk about months, not weeks (Podberscek et al. 1999; Blackwell et al. 2006; DeMartini). Every dog is different. Many dogs need several months of practice; some need help from a veterinarian or qualified behavior professional. This book is not a substitute for veterinary or legal advice.

Force-free, always. Nothing in this book uses punishment, scolding, spray, vibration, bark or electronic collars, or any other method meant to frighten or hurt your dog. The American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior says aversive methods "should not be used under any circumstances" (AVSAB 2025 board statement; AVSAB 2021 position statement).

No medication or supplement advice. Some dogs benefit from medication alongside training; only your veterinarian can decide that. This book doesn't name, recommend or discuss doses of any medication, supplement or calming product.

Not endorsed. This book cites the ASPCA, RSPCA, Dogs Trust, Blue Cross, PDSA, AVSAB, BSAVA, the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists and other organizations, plus published research. None of them has reviewed or endorsed this book.

Where the facts come from. Every fact is linked to its source in the text, so you can check it. When the evidence is thin, we say so plainly. And it often is thin: most studies of separation problems are small, some involved only 5 to 8 dogs, and many relied on what owners reported.

HOW STRONG IS THE EVIDENCE? (OUR LABELS)

moderate	a controlled trial, or large and consistent surveys.
weak	small studies (sometimes a handful of dogs), studies without a comparison group, or early findings.
expert guidance	advice from animal welfare charities, veterinary bodies or specialists that hasn't been tested in a study. That doesn't make it wrong. It just means nobody has measured it yet.

You won't see the word "strong" in this book. No part of separation-anxiety treatment has evidence we'd honestly call strong.

A QUICK START

How to use this book (in 10 minutes)

IN 10 MINUTES

How to use this book

You're stressed and the neighbors are annoyed, so here's the short version:

1. **Tonight:** read Chapter 3 (red flags) and Chapter 4 (week one). Fill in Worksheet 2, the Week-One Coverage Planner.
2. **This week:** film your dog (section 4.2), send the neighbor note if you want to (section 4.3), and check the rule-outs in Chapter 2.
3. **Weeks 1 to 4:** follow the foundation plan in Chapters 5 to 7, logging every session.
4. **After week 4:** Chapter 8 shows you how to keep going, and when to call in a professional.
5. **Keep handy:** the Five-Step Plan card (below), the Stress Signs card (Chapter 6) and the help list (Chapter 11).

Every worksheet in this book is printable. You'll find each one in the section it belongs to.

> **Your plan starts on page 21.**

WHO THIS BOOK IS FOR, AND WHO IT ISN'T

FOR apartment dog owners whose dog howls, barks, chews or has accidents when left alone, and who want a gentle, force-free plan: week-one damage control, a 4-week foundation, and a clear path for the months after.

NOT FOR anyone looking for a cure, a quick fix or a guarantee. It isn't a replacement for your vet, or for a qualified behavior professional if your dog needs one, and it isn't legal advice about your lease, your building or noise rules.

SEE YOUR VET FIRST if any red flag in Chapter 3 applies, such as self-injury, escape attempts, not eating or drinking when alone, accidents, a sudden change (especially in an older dog) or signs of pain.

NOT SURE IT'S SEPARATION DISTRESS? Barking at outside noises, boredom, house-training gaps and age-related changes in an older dog can look similar. Check the rule-outs in Chapter 2.

NEWLY ADOPTED DOG? Newly adopted dogs are more likely to show distress when left (Chapter 2). The no-panic rule in Chapter 4 applies from day one.

WORKSHEET 1

The Five-Step Plan card

Print this and stick it on the fridge. This is the whole plan. Everything else in the book explains or supports these five steps.

We keep the plan to five steps on purpose. In a follow-up of 52 dogs treated at a university clinic, owners who were given more than five instructions saw worse outcomes (Takeuchi et al. 2000, weak to moderate).

Step	What you do	When
1. The no-panic rule	Never leave your dog alone longer than they can cope with during training. Arrange cover for every longer absence.	From day 1, every day
2. Film your dog	Record every training session and any absence you can't cover. Watch live if you can.	From day 1
3. Departure-cue practice	Pick up keys, put on shoes or a coat, and don't leave, until your dog stays relaxed.	About 5 minutes a day, if your dog reacts to cues
4. Graded absences with a log	Step out for less time than it takes your dog to get worried. Come back. Repeat. Lengthen very slowly. Log every session.	Most days, short sessions
5. Calm hellos and goodbyes, plus enrichment	Keep comings and goings low-key and kind. Give your dog exercise, sniffing time and food puzzles.	Every day

> ***Results vary; many dogs need months.***

YOUR WEEK-ONE JOB

Fill in **Worksheet 2: Week-One Coverage Planner** tonight. List every time you'll be out over the next seven days, then write next to each one who or what covers it, plus a backup. It takes ten minutes, and it's the single most useful thing you'll do this week.

This plan gives you a calmer starting point, not a deadline.

YOUR COVER PLAN

The no-panic rule only works if every absence this week is covered. That's a puzzle, not a test of willpower, so let's solve it on paper.

CHAPTER 4

Week 1: Damage control



This chapter is about the next seven days. The goal this week isn't training progress. It's to stop your dog being left to panic, find out what's really happening when you're out, and calm things down with the people around you.

4.1 The no-panic rule: never leave your dog alone longer than they can cope with

Picture this morning. You grab your keys, slip out the door, and before you've reached the elevator the howling starts. By the time you're back that evening there's a note under the door, or an email from the building manager, or a scratched-up door frame. Maybe all three.

This week, before any training, we change one thing: **your dog stops being left alone for longer than they can cope with.** Not for good. Just while you train. This is step 1 of the five core steps, and it's the one everything else depends on.

Why this comes first

Training for separation anxiety works by giving your dog tiny, manageable doses of being alone, short enough that they stay relaxed, and making them longer very gradually. The ASPCA explains that your dog "must experience only a low-intensity version that doesn't frighten him". It follows that "during treatment for separation anxiety, your dog cannot be left alone except during your desensitization sessions" (ASPCA).

The UK charity Dogs Trust says the same thing in plain words: avoid leaving your dog alone, or for longer than they can cope with. "We know how difficult this can be to organise," it says, but "this is the only way to stop the problem getting worse" (Dogs Trust). Separation-anxiety specialist Malena DeMartini makes it a condition of her own program: an agreement not to leave your dog alone outside training "longer than they are comfortable" (DeMartini).

Here's why it matters so much. Every long absence that ends in panic is a lesson in itself, just the wrong one. A review of treatment strategies notes that absences that push a dog over their limit can undo progress (Sargisson 2014). You can do perfect five-minute sessions all evening, but if your dog spends the next day howling alone, that day teaches more than the evening did.

Being honest about the evidence: no study has tested this rule on its own. It's expert guidance, and every major charity and treatment program we reviewed asks for it. We're telling you that so you know which parts of this book are research and which are experience.

What this means for the noise

It also has a practical side that matters in an apartment. On video, dogs with separation problems started vocalizing after an average of just over 3 minutes alone, and vocalizing was what they spent the most time doing (Palestrini et al. 2010). Blue Cross says the first 15 minutes are usually the worst (Blue Cross).

So the howling your neighbors hear is happening during exactly the absences this rule removes. When your dog isn't alone, there's no alone-time howling to hear. This isn't a training result. It's simply what happens when someone's with your dog, and it gives you breathing room while the real work begins.

"But I have to go to work"

We know. This is the hardest part of the whole plan, and it's why it comes first. The good news is you don't need one perfect solution. You need a patchwork that covers this week. See "Your cover plan" (page 8) for the options.

Even for dogs without separation problems, the RSPCA recommends not leaving a dog alone for more than four hours, and Blue Cross gives the same general rule (RSPCA; Blue Cross). For a dog who howls the moment you leave, the safe limit during training is much shorter. For now, assume it's close to zero, until your video (section 4.2) shows you otherwise.

If you truly can't cover an absence

Life happens. If one absence can't be covered this week, keep it as short as you can and film it. Then use what you learn: when did the first signs of worry start? That number becomes your starting line in Chapter 6. Don't treat it as a failure. It's information. If your video shows any red flags from Chapter 3, such as frantic escape attempts or injuries, call your vet before you leave your dog alone again.

4.2 Film your dog (step 2)

You can't fix what you can't see. Owners often miss or misjudge what happens when they're out, and researchers say watching the dog directly is the best way to understand the problem and to track change (Palestrini et al. 2010; Sargisson 2014). In one controlled trial, video picked up differences between groups of dogs that owners' questionnaires didn't (Pankratz et al. 2021). Dogs Trust's advice is simple: "Spy on your dog!" (Dogs Trust).

What you need: any camera that shows you your dog. An old phone, a laptop webcam or a pet camera all work. No special brand is needed. Two phones on a video call let you watch live from the hallway.

How to set it up:

1. Point the camera at the place your dog goes when you leave, usually the front door, plus their bed if you can.
2. Make sure it records sound, because vocalizing is often the first sign.

CASA SCRIPTA

Alone at Home

Separation Anxiety

Get the full guide

This sample includes the title page, the disclaimer and contents, the quick start, who this book is for, the Five-Step Plan card, your week-one job and the first section of the plan. The rest of the guide is on Gumroad:

https://devideg.gumroad.com/l/qcxxca

This page is a sample, not the full book.