

Retired Greyhounds

INFORMATION SHEET

www.gbgb.org.uk

Separation anxiety

Some recently homed retired greyhounds can become very bonded to their new owner(s) and begin to exhibit signs of distress when the owner(s) leave. These distress signs could include, but are not limited to, not eating, drooling, destruction, panting, trembling, excessive licking/chewing, vocalisation or elimination.

There is extensive variation in what each greyhound perceives as triggers or underlying motivation for their distress response. For some greyhounds it can be any owner separation/departure which causes distress, regardless of length of time, time of day or owners' attire. Others can tolerate regular daily work departures but not unscheduled ones. Some will become distressed if left home alone, while for others, just being separated from a particular owner is enough, even if other family members are still around.

Some greyhounds suffer from such severe separation anxiety that their own, as well as the owner(s), quality of life is detrimentally affected. In these cases, the advice of a qualified behaviourist is needed to identify the underlying emotion driving the distress response so a practical treatment plan can be put in place. The greyhound is not being spiteful or ungrateful so it must not be punished should the owner(s) return home and find signs of distress. Punishment will make the problem worse due to increasing the greyhound's level of anxiety/fear relating to the owner(s) leaving the house.

If you are returning home to find destruction, elimination or your neighbours tell you your dog has been barking, howling or whining while you are out of the house, the purchase of a video camera can be very useful to see what your greyhound is doing when you are away from your home and collect the information the behaviourist needs to make an accurate diagnosis.

Short-term strategies to manage separation anxiety include:



Exercise – make sure the greyhound has been for a walk/had some exercise before being left. They are sprint athletes so a short off-lead run will expel any excess energy and help them relax. A walk also offers the opportunity to empty their bowels and bladder.



Enrichment toys – greyhounds tend to like their food, so making mealtimes more of an event can keep them entertained while they are on their own. A snuffle mat makes the greyhound use their nose to find the pieces of food in between the pieces of fabric. Kongs, Licki Mats, Snakes can have wet dog food, soft cheese or peanut butter (make sure it does not contain xylitol) smeared into/on them so



Snuffle Mat.

Retired Greyhounds

INFORMATION SHEET

the greyhound licks to remove the food from the toy. Licking is a calming activity which can lower anxiety. Make sure all toys are suitably durable and safe to leave with your greyhound when they are home alone and that your greyhound will not destroy the toys. Treat dispensing toys (e.g. the Kong Wobbler) provide an active meal as they need to be moved around using the nose or paws to knock the food out of them. You can put their dry food into one of these and your greyhound will have great fun working for their dinner.



Pheromones and calming diffusers

– Adaptil, Pet Remedy and Calmex are refillable plug-in room diffusers. They release fragrances, which spread around your house, that are formulated to calm dogs.



Kong Wobbler.



Kong, Licki Mat, Kong bone and Snake.

Long-term strategies to manage separation anxiety may include:



Teaching calm/relaxation in a safe space

– e.g. a crate, or in a particular room of the house with a baby gate across the door. Initially, while you are in the same room, then when you are in the house but not in the same room, building up to eventually being able to leave the house. This will help your greyhound learn to settle and relax in that area of the house. A comfy bed, lots of treats and calm praise while in the safe space will build the dog's desire to be in this area. A lot of retired greyhounds are used to being in crates while in their trainer's van for travelling to the track. Although some greyhounds that suffer from separation anxiety may be more distressed being confined to a crate or room, so don't do this if it causes more distress, but seek advice from a qualified behaviourist.



Practising training departures – putting your shoes on in the porch or the rattle of your car keys can be predictors and anxiety triggers for your greyhound. Since moving in they will have learnt these are signs that mean they are about to be separated from you. To desensitise your greyhound to these predictors, practice parts of your departure routine (e.g. picking up your car keys) but don't leave the house, instead go and sit on the sofa. Calmly reward

Retired Greyhounds

INFORMATION SHEET

your greyhound (treat, stroke, verbal praise) if they do not become anxious or as soon as they return to being calm. This can be done several times a day, while your greyhound is in a relaxed state e.g. while licking a Licki Mat. The goal is for these predictions of departure to no longer be an anxiety trigger. Be careful to watch your greyhound's reactions, as doing too much of your departure routine at once or doing the routine too frequently could increase rather than decrease your greyhound's feelings of anxiety towards these triggers.

anxiety so they are more able to think and process what they are learning during their training sessions.



Behavioural assessment – a qualified behaviourist will create a tailored treatment plan based on the needs and behaviour of your greyhound. For moderate to severe cases there is no quick fix as the underlying emotions need to be changed and this takes time, consistent training and patience. The behaviourist will visit frequently to re-assess the treatment plan and monitor any progress.



Pharmacological intervention – on the advice of the qualified behaviourist and your veterinary surgeon, it may be suggested that medication could aid the treatment plan. The medication is to reduce the greyhound's

For more information on separation anxiety in dogs, and when searching for a qualified behaviourist look for someone registered with one of the following organisations:



- The Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors www.apbc.org.uk



- Animal Behaviour and Training Council www.abtc.org.uk



- The Association for the Study of Animal Behaviour (ASAB) and Certificated Clinical Animal Behaviourists (CCAB) www.asab.org



- Fellowship of Animal Behaviour Clinicians www.fabclinicians.org

