



Managing Pet Anxiety Amid Transitioning Routines

by Darris Cooper, CPDT-KA

(NAPS)—As students return to in-person learning and pet parents gradually begin to spend more time outside the house, pets around the country are having to adapt to new daily routines, adjust to more time alone and navigate more frequent social interactions. Pets thrive on predictability, so it's not uncommon to see them exhibit anxious or destructive behaviors when their routines shift dramatically. Fortunately, there are many resources and tools available to help pet parents make this transition as seamless as possible for their furry family members.

To support your pets' mental health as they adjust to their new daily routine, while managing and mitigating separation and social anxiety, focus on:

Setting Up a Safe Home Environment

Creating a safe space in your home will give your pet a comfortable place to recharge after social interactions or feel more secure when left alone. This space should include a cozy place to sleep, favorite toys and appropriate calming products.

Increasing Exposure and Alone Time

After more than a year of social distancing, it will take time for your pet to adjust to more socializing and, on the flip side, more time alone. To help curb social and separation anxiety, it's important to safely and gradually expose your pets to increased time alone or new environments, experiences, animals and people.

Arming Yourself with the Right Tools

There are several ways to keep your pets entertained, happy and healthy as they adjust to their new routine. I like to recommend calming aids such as supplements, collars or even a Thundershirt to help relieve anxiety caused by stressful or unfamiliar situations. Pet cameras are an easy way to monitor your pet's behavior while you're away, while long-lasting chews and puzzle toys provide mental stimulation and an outlet for pent-up energy that could otherwise turn into anxious or destructive behaviors.

Practice, Practice, Practice

Adjusting to a new routine is not easy for any pet and will take time and practice. To help prepare pet parents and their pets for these inevitable changes to daily life, I worked with Petco's vet-



You can help your pet get through separation anxiety and other disruptions of the new normal.

erinary and dog training teams and the Petco Pet Wellness Council to develop a Four-Week Guide to Helping Your Pet Deal with a New Routine, which offers week-by-week actionable steps to help ease pet separation and social anxiety. During the month of September, Petco is also offering pet parents free access to "Well-Adjusted Dog: Preparing for Separation and Social Anxiety," a one-hour virtual, interactive training led by certified senior dog trainers that brings the four-week guide to life. In partnership with Fanna Easter, a certified separation anxiety trainer, our team of training experts at Petco has also developed and launched the "Separation Anxiety Training Course," a new four-week long separation anxiety training class focused on proactive solutions. The course is currently available at Petco pet care centers or online.

The coming months will be a season of dramatic change for pets and pet parents alike. It will be important to monitor your pet for any physical or behavioral symptoms of anxiety and work with your veterinarian or pet care professional to adjust your pet's separation or social anxiety trainings accordingly.

If you'd like more information on how to best support your pet's mental health or to register for one of Petco's new pet anxiety courses, visit petco.com/mental-health and petco.com/dogtraining.

• *Darris Cooper, CPDT-KA, is the National Dog Training Manager at Petco. He has worked in the industries of animal training and behavior, pet lifestyle and broadcast journalism, and has been a professional dog trainer for more than 10 years.*