

COVID-19 and its Impact on Pets



Humans weren't the only ones whose lives were disrupted by COVID-19; pets suddenly had their world turned upside down when people shifted to working from home. Dogs and cats that were accustomed to spending time alone suddenly had constant companionship not to mention there is a whole generation of new puppies who have grown up with this lifestyle as their norm.

Dogs and cats aren't equipped to process the hows and whys of these changes to our lifestyles, therefore they may struggle to adapt.

However, just as dogs have acclimated to the changes of having family members around more, they may be in for a tougher time as people slowly return to their pre-isolation lifestyles.

Although the stay-at-home lockdowns were tough on us all, one silver lining for our pets is that we can come out of this with a much deeper sense of empathy for what our animals go through when we leave them alone all day.

We got a taste of how most pets lived when they would spend all day home alone, every day, during pre-COVID times. During lockdowns we started striving to maintain our mental stimulation, physical activity, and social connections. We are able to better recognise the importance these factors play on our own mental health.

As pets once again have to adapt to changes it is more important than ever to recognise how much mental stimulation, social contact, and exercise will help them to re-adjust. Now that pets are again spending time alone, we may see an increase in separation anxiety.

Counterconditioning with KONG

If a dog or puppy demonstrates a milder case of separation anxiety, try counterconditioning with a KONG toy. Counterconditioning is the process of changing a dog's negative reaction to a positive one instead. By using a KONG toy stuffed with a dog's favourite high-value food we are better able to create a positive association and provide a distraction during what normally would be a stress inducing situation. Separation anxiety typically occurs within the first 20 minutes of a dog being left alone. By giving a dog a time-consuming food puzzle before departure, it not only distracts them from their peak anxiety, but starts to create a positive association between being alone and a getting a reward like a stuffed KONG.



Tips to help with Mild Separation Anxiety

- Don't make a big deal about leaving or returning home, even when a dog is excited to see you remain calm until they settle.
- Leave a T.V. on or music playing.
- Walk the dog before you leave the house.
- Hire a dog walker or pet sitter who will break up the dog's day, they may walk or simply play with the dog while they adjust to the changes.
- Consider doggy day-care, however bear in mind that if a dog is not overly social with other dogs then this may increase their stress.
- Play dates, if friends or neighbours have dogs who get along well, they may like to consider scheduling pet sitting each other's dogs.

We can hope that this universal experience has helped pet parents everywhere to better understand their pets' lives and how much they rely on us to provide enrichment and companionship.



Article supplied by Rachael James on behalf of KONG® Company Pty Ltd