How does your dog know you are leaving? Your dog gets excited or anxious when you are putting on your coat, picking up your keys or putting on your shoes. As humans, we have rituals when we are getting ready to go somewhere. Your dog can figure out very quickly that this means he may be left alone. For a dog that is anxious, this could also mean to him that you are never coming back.

With this “predeparture anxiety”, we can start to work on a training agenda that will hopefully eliminate this. You can do this by exposing your dog to these cues in various orders several times a day—**without** leaving. For example, pick up your car keys then place them back on the table. Or pick up your keys, and sit down and watch TV for awhile. This will help reduce your dog’s anxiety because he won’t always associate that when you pick up the keys, it means you will be leaving. But you also need to be aware of other cues that your dog may interpret as leaving him. This is the time to pay close attention to your “departure ritual” on what you do. It may be putting on a coat, picking up your purse, hearing the horn beep of your car as you unlock it…..there are many different signals that your dog picks up on. As I was teaching dog training classes, I would hear from many students that their dog would always get excited before getting in the car to go class. How did they know when class was? After talking with one of the students, they realized that before class she would pack up her training bag for her dog that included toys and treats. She would leave it on the table near the door before she left that day. As soon as she picked it up, her dog knew that it was time to go to class to have some fun (and treats) with her. Her dog didn’t know what day of the week it was, but knew that bag meant something good was going to happen. So not only is there a negative association, but there can also be a positive association with various cues.

Always remember to behave in a very calm and quiet manner when going out and coming in. Don’t make a big fuss about saying goodbye to your dog, just give him a pat on the head, and say goodbye and leave. Similarly, when arriving home, say hello to your dog and then don’t pay attention to him until he’s calm and relaxed. To decrease your dog’s excitement level when you come home, it may help to distract him with a simple behavior that you ask of him, such as sit, down or paw.

Next training tip we will discuss more ways to work with your dog on how to minimize separation anxiety.