Treasure Hunt Game

What does this have to do with resolving your dog's separation anxiety?

- Dogs with separation anxiety are suffering from chronic stress.
- Research shows that when animals are stressed it's harder to get rid of their fear.
- Research also shows that once a fear has been removed, it's less likely to stick in animals suffering from chronic stress.
- Reducing stress will make it easier for a dog to learn.
- Enrichment activities that allow a dog to practice natural behaviors have been proven to reduce anxiety.
- A study showed that dogs with separation anxiety tended to have a pessimistic bias (expecting bad things to happen).
- Another study showed that practicing Nosework changed a dog's bias from pessimistic to optimistic.
- Nosework can build confidence and independence, both traits that will help your dog feel less anxious when you leave.

For this game you will need:

- Treats your dog LOVES

- Boxes – You'll need 3 to start with, and more as you go on. The boxes should not be clear since we want to encourage the dog to use their nose. The size of the box can range from 4"x5" on up. Save those Amazon boxes!

  Why use boxes, instead of just hiding the treat?

  o Boxes give dogs a visual cue in addition to the smell of the treat. This reduces the chance that your dog will search for treats when you aren't playing the game. You don't want your dog to start digging in your couch in search of treats!

  o Boxes ensure you know where the treat is. Once you get to the level where you are hiding 4 or 5 treats you may forget where you put them. If you're using a box, you can narrow it down.

Start and end cue

SESSION 1

Step 1:

Place your treat in the box, but don't close it up. As a matter of fact, if your box has flaps you should push them inside against the vertical walls of the box so they're out of the way.

Your dog should be prevented from accessing the search area, either in a crate, behind a game or in a down stay. It's ok at this stage if they can see you.

Place the box with the treat on the floor in clear sight – initially we want it super easy so the dog can be successful, and so that they can learn the cue to get started.

Release your dog and say **"Find It!"** When they do praise and tell them how smart they are!

Say **"All Done"** to let your dog know they found all the treats.

Step 2:

Repeat above four more times, however move the box around to different spots in the room.

SESSION 2

Step 1:

This time you'll use 2 boxes, but only one will contain a treat.

Your dog should be prevented from accessing the search area, either in a crate, behind a game or in a down stay. It's ok at this stage if they can see you.

Place the boxes on the floor in clear sight at least 2 feet apart.

Release your dog and say **"Find It!"** When they do praise and tell them how smart they are!

Say **"All Done"** to let your dog know they found all the treats.

Step 2:

Repeat above four more times, however move the boxes around to different spots in the room.

Now your dog is starting to learn that not all boxes have treats!

SESSION 3

Step 1:

This time you'll use 3 boxes. Two will contain a treat, one will be empty.

Your dog should be prevented from accessing the search area, either in a crate, behind a game or in a down stay. It's ok at this stage if they can see you.

Place the boxes on the floor in clear sight at least 2 feet apart.

Release your dog and say **"Find It!"** When they do praise and tell them how smart they are!

Say **"All Done"** to let your dog know they found all the treats.

Step 2:

Repeat above four more times, however move the boxes around to different spots in the room.

Now your dog is starting to learn that not all boxes have treats, but more than one will!

SESSION 4

Step 1:

3 boxes. Two will contain a treat, one will be empty.

Your dog should be prevented from accessing the search area, either in a crate, behind a game or in a down stay. It's ok at this stage if they can see you.

Place the boxes on the floor, BUT this time place them so that they're a bit more difficult to find – not in plain sight. Don't make it too hard just yet.

Release your dog and say **"Find It!"** When they do praise and tell them how smart they are!

Say **"All Done"** to let your dog know they found all the treats.

Step 2:

Repeat above four more times, however move the boxes around to different spots in the room.

Now your dog is starting to learn that not all boxes have treats, but more than one will!

SESSION 5

Step 1:

5 boxes. Three will contain a treat, two will be empty.

Your dog should be prevented from accessing the search area, either in a crate, behind a game or in a down stay. It's ok at this stage if they can see you.

Place the boxes on the floor so that they're a bit more difficult to find – not in plain sight. Don't make it too hard just yet.

Release your dog and say **"Find It!"** When they do praise and tell them how smart they are!

Say **"All Done"** to let your dog know they found all the treats.

Step 2:

Repeat above four more times, however move the boxes around to different spots in the room.

Now your dog is starting to learn that they have to actively search!

SESSION 6

Step 1:

5 boxes. Three will contain a treat, two will be empty.

Your dog should be prevented from accessing the search area, either in a crate, behind a game or in a down stay. It's ok at this stage if they can see you.

Place a few of the boxes on the floor, place the rest on a higher level within your dog's reach. It could be on a chair, coffee table, ottoman, etc.

Release your dog and say **"Find It!"** When they do praise and tell them how smart they are!

Say **"All Done"** to let your dog know they found all the treats.

Step 2:

Repeat above four more times, however move the boxes around to different spots in the room.

Now your dog is starting to learn to look at different heights.

What's after this?

Find ways to make it slightly more challenging for your dog.

- Increase the number of boxes.
- Expand the search to two rooms, then three rooms, then the whole house.
- Close the flaps of the box to make your dog work to get the treat.