

# YOUR HOME ALONE DOG

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You have been planning for a long time. You found just the right dog, bought all your equipment and now the day has come. You are bringing home your new puppy or dog and plan to spend a large amount of quality time with him. You have even arranged for a long weekend away from work, some vacation time or are fortunate enough to have the summer off. Great! Now it is time to leave your new dog alone. Yes, you must start leaving your dog almost as soon as you get him home.

One of the main issues that dogs have in their new home is adjusting to being alone. The reality is that no matter how flexible your schedule there will be time when you must leave your dog alone. You can help to make this a tolerable and possibly pleasant experience for your dog if you start early in their training. It might seem kind to spend lots of time with your dog when he first arrives but it is even kinder to prepare him for those hours when he must be without you.

## **So, where do your start?**

First you need a safe place for your dog to stay. One ideal safe, secure environment is a crate. These come in many style and must be large enough for your dog to stand up, turn around and comfortably stretch out when he lies down. Some people also use X-pens to give the dog more room. Other options include small rooms such as a bathroom or utility room. If you give your new dog too much space he is likely to be nervous and get into trouble by using your possessions as chew toys or toilets.

Please do not plan on leaving your new dog or puppy alone with free run of your house. Even if you have an adult dog that is supposedly house trained and experienced, he may have problems the first few times you leave him alone in your home. Most of the time a dog with a successful history of staying home alone can be quickly weaned off the following advice once he has proved trustworthy. Caution in the beginning will pay off with a happy dog that is not distressed and destructive when you leave.

Next decide on a special treat that your dog will only get when you leave. This can be a stuffed Kong (or other type of treat dispensing toy), pig's ear, stuffed sterilized bone, bully stick or any other extra yummy goodie. Always test any new chew treat for safety before you leave your dog alone with it. You might also have a special toy and perhaps even something with your scent on it to leave with your dog.

Now you can plan out your routine and a few "safe cues." Safe cues are activities you do every time you leave that warn you dog you are leaving but also let him know you will be coming back. They give your dog that second piece of information because you have practiced them often and have indeed returned. Safe cues include things like turning on the radio, telling your dog to "be good," picking up your keys, preparing your dog's special treat, etc. These cues are just a regular part of your leaving routine. Your dog learns they are safe because he has seen them many times and they have reliably predicted your exit and your eventual return. Make sure you keep your exits low-key and boring. No "poor puppy" thoughts or comments. No extra hugs or good-byes. This could add to your dog's distress if he feels you are distressed.

## **Time to leave your dog.**

You are now ready to leave. Start to teach your dog that your leaving is no big deal and he will be OK by practicing at times when you only leave for a few minutes. You might even start by just going into the other room for a few minutes. Look at trips to the mailbox, garage or taking out the trash as a bit of practice for your dog to be alone. Do follow the same minimum routine that you will follow when you leave for longer periods of time.

The more often you can practice leaving your dog the better he will get. Lots of quick, short sessions will give a foundation for success. This especially applies if you are lucky enough to be at home with your dog a lot. Remember, no matter what you hope for your lifestyle, at some point you will have to leave your dog. There is no way to explain to him what is happening. Practice is the best way to teach him he will be safe.

When you return, remain calm and keep your greeting low key. You might even delay letting your dog out for a few minutes. When you do let him out, calmly say hello, give your dog a quick pat and let him out to potty. If the special treat you have given your dog is not consumed, go ahead and let your dog out but either take the treat away or lock it in the crate. Remember, this treat is reserved for the times you leave. If you let him have it once you have returned it will not be so special.

Eventually, as your dog adjusts to your home and has proved that he is trustworthy, you can start slowly giving him more freedom. Keep all of your normal leaving and returning routines in place as you give your dog a bit more space over time.

### **A word about crates.**

Though not a place where your dog should spend the majority of his time, a crate can make his time alone safe, secure and pleasant. How do you get your dog love his crate? Always look for opportunities to reward your dog any time he voluntarily goes into his crate even when you are not leaving. If he wanders by and sniffs the door, calmly praise him and toss a treat. Even better if the treat goes just inside the crate. Practice sit or down stays outside the crate and then release him to get his treat in the crate where he can collect his treat. You can even proof stays by placing a treat in the crate and then release him to get it. At least once a day, booby-trap his crate with a treat or two. This little surprise will make him love his special place. Feed him in his crate once a day. If your dog likes to fetch objects, make getting the toy out of the crate part of your game. Be creative and look for any opportunity to associate good things in your dog's life with his crate.