

Teaching Your Dog To Stay Home Alone

With new drugs on the market to help ease the symptoms of separation anxiety, is there really anything a pet owner can do to help eliminate the causes? Or better yet, help prevent them? To successfully improve or tackle this problem, both the owner's and the dog's behavior need to be modified. Here are some simple things you can do for your Four Footed Friend.

Departures and Arrivals

Make going away and coming home less dramatic. Matter of factly leave the house. Return the same way. Try to be unemotional. What sort of pre-cues do you give the dog that tell it you are getting ready to leave? Putting on your jacket, grabbing your cap, the sound of your car keys and getting your briefcase or purse are all cues to the dog. Go through the motions, then don't leave. Repeat until the dog no longer finds this distressing.

When you really do leave, ignore the dog for at least 15 minutes before you go. Upon your arrival, greet the dog after you've hung up your jacket and put your things away wait for the dog to be in a calm and relaxed state.

Teach Appropriate Behavior

Set up training sessions where you separate yourself from the dog. Place a baby gate in a doorway between two rooms with you on one side and the dog on the other. After a few quiet minutes, remove the baby gate without any fanfare and let the dog in the room with you again. If the dog was noisy while you were temporarily separated, you must wait until there is a quiet moment before you let the dog out. You don't want the dog to learn that noisy behavior will be rewarded with your presence. Gradually increase the distance you stand or sit from the gate and the time you spend separated. Eventually move out of the dog's sight. Do this in short time increments at first.

Change the Picture

What if you could actually make a dog look forward to you leaving! Start by buying a special toy (Buster Cube, kong), or a hollow bone that you can fill with treats. Teach the dog to really want it. Let it watch you fuss over and fill the toy. Place the toy on the other side of a baby gate or locked inside the dog's crate where it can't get to it. Pretend to get ready to leave the house. Go back to the toy and fuss over it again, making sure the dog can't get it. Next, put the dog behind the baby gate, or into the crate, where the toy is. Go sit down for a few minutes. Return while the dog is still interacting with the toy/bone . Remove the toy/bone and let the dog out. Do not praise the dog. You don't get rewarded for coming out, you get rewarded for staying alone on the other side of the baby gate or crate.

Exercise, Exercise, Exercise

A good dog is a tired dog. It's impossible for the dog to get into trouble when it's sleeping. Dogs need lots of physical exercise and mental stimulation. Try to tire the dog by playing ball or tug before you leave. To keep the dog's mind busy, leave a treat-filled toy, bone or Buster Cube for the dog. Make something for the dog to dissect. Crumple some biscuits up in a paper bag or two. You can wrap up some scrumptious treats in an old rag. Tie as many knots as you can and let the dog figure out how to get the treats.

Educate Yourself

When it comes to dogs, there's always more to learn. Contact me at Dee Ganley Training Services 603-735-5543 or the Upper Valley Humane Society 603-448-MUTT ext.103. The following books were used as a reference for this article: *The Culture Clash* by Jean Donaldson, *Toolbox For Remodeling Your Problem Dog* by Terry Ryan, and *Taking Care of Puppy Business - A Gentle Approach for Positive Results* by Gail Pivar and Leslie Nelson. Copyright Ganley/Lyon