**Teaching your dog to be left alone**

Our tips

* Create a safe space for your dog
* Create a pleasant association with being alone
* Break the expectation of you leaving
* Build a steady leaving routine

If possible, don't leave your dog at all for the time you are training your dog. Consider asking a friend or relative to come and dog-sit or leave your dog with someone else you trust; you could also take your dog to day-care if this suits them.

Get your dog used to short periods alone (we're talking seconds or minutes) before trying to leave them for longer. If your dog becomes distressed at all through the training, you should take a step backwards and proceed at a slower pace.

**Creating a safe space**

Ideally choose somewhere where your dog eats and sleeps already; perhaps have a mat in the kitchen or use a crate. Your dog should love this place and be happy to settle here whilst you are around.

In this area use a product such as Adaptil, which releases a calming hormone. Other dogs respond well to a Thunder Shirt, which apply a gentle, comforting pressure around the torso. For very severe cases your vet may also be able to suggest medication that will help calm your dog enough to start working on the issue.

**Pleasant association with being alone**

If they don't already, introduce your dog to food toys such as a Kong, treat balls or other chewable toys. Chewing is incredibly relaxing for dogs. Make the treat puzzles easy to use at first if they aren't sure what to do. Sit next to the safe space with your dog having the chew or Kong.

Repeat until your dog recognises that this space is for calm and relaxed activity time. Once your dog has learned this you can start to gradually add in 'triggers' which might cause your dog anxiety. A trigger is an activity as simple as walking to the door or putting your coat on – something that will likely get your dog up and following you.

Just do one at a time – if your dog gets up or shows any other signs of distress, sit back down until your dog settles then try again. You may need to get up and down many times until your dog stops responding and remains relaxed. Work up to being able to walk out of the room and have a happy and content dog.

**Breaking the expectation**

If putting your coat on is a trigger, do other activities such as washing up or reading a book while wearing your coat. If it is the sound of keys, then jangle them at random times to help your dog realise these things don't necessarily mean that you are leaving.

**Building a steady leaving routine**

1.  Take them for a walk before you go out to help tire them and make them more likely to sleep. Let them have plenty of sniffing time which uses their brains but avoid exciting games such as fetch.

2.  Give them the chew or Kong a couple of minutes before you leave. You could also hide treats around the room so your dog can keep their noses and minds occupied. Pick the food item up when you return as a gentle encouragement for the dog to eat it while you are away rather than waiting until you return.

3.  If you normally have a busy household or have a radio, music or TV on then leave this on when you go out, so the house isn't suddenly quiet. Dogs seem to find classical music most relaxing and there is music specifically composed for dogs, but it is important that your dog is used to the sounds so it may be best to leave on what you usually have on, but at a quieter volume.

4.  Relaxed hellos and goodbyes. Don't give your dog lots of fuss just before you leave, as it will mark it out as being A BIG DEAL. Then act the same way when you come back into the house – you don't need to completely ignore your dog but don't make a big fuss. If your dog is really excited to see you, take a minute to take off your shoes, set down your bags and then say hello.

5.  Never punish your dog. Some people think that dogs mess or chew things to get back at them for being away. This is not true! Dogs mess and chew because they are bored or anxious. It can be hard, but dogs can pick up on your tone of voice and body language so if you do come home to a mess, ignore it and calmly put the dog into another room or garden with something to do and clear up while your dog is not there.

**Specific issues**

**Being destructive, such as chewing and ripping objects, digging or scratching.**

This can also be the result of boredom or lack of exercise, as well as part of the natural development of puppies and young dogs. If the destruction is focused particularly around door or window frames then that could be more likely anxiety.

**Toileting in the house.**

If your dog is young, make sure their housetraining is good. If they are getting older, then perhaps they can no longer hold it for as long as they used to and could benefit from a check-up with your vets. If they are messing even if you are gone for a short time, even 5 minutes, then that would more likely be a sign of anxiety.

**Noise such as howling, barking or whining.**

Get a neighbour to listen out, or set a video to record. It could be reactivity to passer­bys or the postman. Solutions to this include training to get them used to doorbells and knocking, or shading the lower part of your windows. If it is sustained, then that would more likely be a sign of anxiety.

**Physical reactions such as panting, shaking or drooling as you get ready to leave.**

This is a clear sign of anxiety. Read more about separation anxiety in our Pet Care Advice section.