



Preparing Your Dog to be Left Alone

Unless you promote some level of independence in your dog, your dog may have a difficult and anxious time when you have to leave him. Try these techniques to help your dog feel confident outside of your presence:

Before Leaving

- Ignore your dog for approximately twenty 20 to 30 minutes before you go out.
- Leave a special toy or treat to distract your dog when you leave, then remove the item on your return.

When Returning Home

- Interact with your dog only on your initiative. If your dog is overly excited to see you, ignore him until he is quiet and relaxed.
- Do not punish or reprimand your dog for destructive behavior or accidents that occurred while you were gone. Harsh punishments long after the act serve no purpose and will only increase your dog's anxiety.

At Home

- Interact with your dog only when he is relaxed and when you initiate the contact.
- Work on teaching your dog to "stay," gradually increasing time and distance away from you, one at a time. Build up to "out-of-sight" stays of extended duration.
- Go through your "departure cues," like picking up your keys or putting on your coat, at times when you really aren't leaving. This will help desensitize your dog to those pre-departure rituals.

Some dogs, unfortunately, suffer from severe forms of separation anxiety. This is a commonly recognized disorder that can manifest itself in various forms when the dog is left alone.

A dog with this disorder is usually calm and well-behaved around the person or people he is most attached to. However, when left alone, the dog will exhibit signs of anxiety such as destructive behavior (chewing or digging), soiling (urination or defecation), or vocalization (barking, howling or whining). Dogs with separation anxiety will often "shadow" their owner, following them from room to room, become visibly upset when their owners prepare to leave, and will greet their owners with extreme enthusiasm when their owners return home.

If you suspect that your dog may have this disorder, consult your veterinarian for diagnosis and treatment. There are many medications available now that can be helpful for this condition.