



ALONE TIME FOR YOUR NEW PUPPY

Like us, dogs form strong social bonds. This is certainly one of the reasons we love them so much. Whether it's raising their young or hunting, dogs are highly motivated to stay with their group. If they are separated from one another, they will likely demonstrate behaviors that will help reunite them to their family. This can include barking, whining, howling, increased agitation, or if there is a barrier preventing access to the group, it might result in the dog scratching, digging, or chewing points of entry or exit.

Steps must be taken with puppies and newly adopted dogs to help them learn to cope with being alone. Helping a puppy or adult dog to learn to be calm and relaxed when left alone is a vital part of helping them live a happy life. This is most effectively achieved as soon as they begin to adjust to their new environment and prior to them developing separation issues and resulting patterns of troublesome behaviors.

When the dog first enters our home and our heart we tend to smother him with attention in an attempt to make him feel secure. However, when it's time to leave him and resume our normal activities (work or school 8 to 10 hour days, dinners with friends, going to the movies, gym, etc.) the dog is in for an enormous letdown as he faces being left alone without the benefit of prior support from his family to learn to handle it. Even dogs that are fortunate to have stay at home parents need to be able to cope with the eventuality of being left alone and lifestyle changes that may cause the dog to be left more when older. It is much more challenging for an older dog to adapt to periods of isolation if they have not learned to cope with this as a youngster. Tolerating separation does not typically get easier with time, it gets harder.

Getting Off to a Good Start

Set the precedent as soon as your dog arrives into their new home by providing him with an array of food stuffed chew toys (The Comfort Bone, hollow bones, etc.), food dispensing puzzle toys (Twist n' Treat, Tricky Treat Ball, etc.) and leave him in a dog proofed area (such as an exercise pen or gated off area) or crate for short bits of time (refer to the Crate Training handout). Start with just a few minutes and stay close by. Over the course of brief practice sessions, gradually increase the duration of separation with you close by. Then, work on increasing your distance away for brief moments. Gradually increase the time you leave your pup to play with their toys with you progressively farther away and eventually out of sight.

Practice having your dog spend time on his or her own every day, building the amount of time your pup can spend resting in their gated off long-term area and/or crate. It is to your dog's benefit to learn to self-pacify when you are not available and close by. Brief, daily practice sessions help your dog build a strong learning muscle in a calm and stress free manner.

Tethering

In addition to the use of a long-term (ex-pen or gated off area) and short-term (a crate) confinement area, let your pup practice their self-pacifying skills when tethered by leash to a stable object nearby (within 4 to 10 feet) while you watch TV or work at your computer. Provide him with a delicious chew toy and a dog bed or towel to rest on. Once in a while get up to go to the kitchen, walk into another room, go out of view briefly—only leaving him tethered away from you for a few seconds at a time to start.

Calm Returns and Departures

Make an effort to reserve returning to and interacting with your pup for when he is calm and quiet. If you are patient and calm yourself it will help your pup learn what works and what doesn't in regards to getting your attention. Also, be sure to keep your departures low-key. Again, your dog is likely to react to and learn from your behavior. Help them to learn to be calm, cool, and collected when you leave and return by being this way yourself.

Consistent Alone Time Practice

When the weekends roll around, try to maintain schedules and routines that would normally apply on weekdays. Even though you can spend more time with your pup on your days off, be sure to sprinkle in some alone time then as well. This way Mondays will be easier for him to handle.

Troubleshooting

To aid your puppy in relaxing and being content alone you can try covering a portion of the crate with a towel, adding more irresistible, healthy food in the chew toys, providing more exercise to tire your pup out physically, and playing more training games to tire your pup out mentally.