

Teaching puppy to be home alone

Dogs are social animals who naturally live in groups. In today's modern world however most dogs need to be left alone for long periods of time. This guide is intended to assist you in implementing a 'home alone' puppy schedule so that your puppy can get used to spending time alone gradually and even enjoy being left alone while the family are at work or school.

Planning is critical in order to get your puppy off to the right start. It can be extremely traumatic for puppies to be left home alone by their families. They have just come from a breeder where they lived 24 hours a day with their mum and siblings for 8 – 10 weeks. They had constant play mates, attention, warmth, security and food. All of a sudden, their mum and siblings are gone, they are in a new environment with different smells, sounds and people who they have only just met. Being a social animal, your puppy will now look to you and your family for everything. They need you to offer the security, warmth and attention that their dog family gave them. Because puppy has had so many changes happen already in their short life, it makes sense to ease them into being left home alone. By doing so, not only will your puppy thank you but also your neighbors who will be spared the cries of a lonely puppy.



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Ideally, plan to take several weeks off work so that you could settle your new addition to the family into their new home. It is strongly recommended that you aim for a minimum of 14 days off work but preferably 21 days especially if puppy will be expected to spend up to 12 hours a day home alone while you are at work. Interestingly, most people do not take any time off work when they get a new dog or puppy, expecting them to simply adjust to their new home, people and life. Your puppy is a 15 year investment so to get them off to the right start, take a break from work for a few weeks and invest in your pups long term future. The time taken off work to settle your puppy is not just to develop independence but also to teach puppy all the important things they need to know in order to be a valued member of the family.

A Puppy 'Separation Schedule'

Obviously you have to go back to work one day or there will be occasions when pup will need to stay home alone. The first 14 - 21 days of pup coming home you will need to prepare pup for this event. For the first 5 days, spend every second with your puppy. This is an important adjustment period where they are feeling insecure at the loss of their dog family but also getting to know their new human family. Provide lots of love, attention and security for your puppy at this time. Pup will want to follow you around and be close to you at all times. Even if you have another dog at home, you still need to plan and monitor your separations.



Aside from hiding in the house to see if your puppy settles, another great way to monitor how pup is going is to set up a video camera near a window to record your puppy when you are not home. This allows you to see how pup is spending his or her time plus hear if pup is crying or barking. If you don't have a video camera, try borrowing one from a friend for a few days. Alternatively you can buy one or two small wireless cameras quite cheaply and use your computer or video recorder to monitor your pup's behaviour. Another simple way is to tell your neighbors about your puppy 'separations' so that they can also report back to you about how it is all going.

 Work out the number of hours that your pup is required to spend home and alone and the number of days you have to reach this target. For this example, the total number of hours pup needs to be able to spend alone is 10 hours per day with 17 days to reach that target.

- 🐕 Purchase ADAPTIL spray and an ADAPTIL collar for puppy to assist to create a sense of calm and security for puppy during this transition period.
- 🐕 Get a copy of 'Does your dog need enrichment' so that you can get ideas on how to provide 5 to 7 enrichment items to your puppy every time you leave them home alone.
- 🐕 Trial all enrichment items several times and show puppy how to use them before leaving pup unsupervised.
- 🐕 Provide several toys in addition to the other forms of enrichment and rotate the toys to keep them fun and interesting. Provide a comfy bed close to the door for puppy to rest on till you come home and ensure there is shelter over the bed and plenty of water to drink.
- 🐕 Only give these enrichment items and associated treats when pup will be left home alone. This helps to make your absence fun, special and something to look forward to.
- 🐕 When leaving pup, keep all comings and goings calm. Leaving and coming home should be non events rather than exciting ones to help keep puppies emotions under control.
- 🐕 For all separations, call pup outside, hide the enrichment items around the yard, quietly say goodbye – this becomes the cue that you are leaving and that good stuff is about to happen. Leave the same way that you will when you go to work or go out.

Sample Home alone Schedule

Day 1 – 5 Stay at home with pup and provide security, comfort and attention. After this first 5 days you can begin to implement the puppy separation schedule to ease your pup into spending time alone. Day 6 Reminder - Set the video and/or tell your neighbor's, give 5 – 7 enrichment items and leave and return calmly every day.

Day 6 Leave pup for 15 minutes.

Day 7 Leave pup for 30 minutes

Day 8 Leave pup for 60 minutes

Day 9 Leave pup for 1 ½ hours.

Day 10 Leave pup for 2 hours.

Day 11 Leave pup for 3 hours.

Day 12 Leave pup for 4 hours.

Day 13 Leave pup for 5 hours.

Day 14 Leave pup for 6 hours.

Day 15 Leave pup for 7 hours.

Day 16 Leave pup for 8 hours.

Day 17 Leave pup for 9 hours.

Day 18 Leave pup for 10 hours – Back to work today.



Every puppy is different so you need assess how well your puppy is handling the time alone and adjust the separation times as needed. Never rush the time spent alone, it is better to take things really slowly then to leave pup home alone too quickly and for too long. Ideally build up by 30 minutes only per day until you know puppy is calm and relaxed when you are gone. In no time your pup may actually look forward to you leaving so he can run around and find all the treat balls etc. that have been hidden around the yard.

Importantly, make sure your yard is secure with tall fences to prevent your pup or dog from jumping out or digging under. Padlock all gates, ensure there are several shady areas and shelter for protection from rain and adverse weather. Provide several water sources so that cool, fresh water is always available and provide one or more outdoor beds. If you leave pup indoors when you go out, in addition to the above, ensure the pup is trained to use an indoor toilet so that they can relieve themselves while you are gone.

If at any time you are concerned that your puppy is not adjusting to being home alone despite carefully following this schedule, do not hesitate to contact a dog behavioural trainer or veterinary behaviorist as your puppy may have a form of anxiety that causes it greater than normal distress at being separation from family members.