

## Alone Time

One of the things that most upsets new puppy parents is that, when you first leave them alone, puppies often scream or whimper in dismay! When you think about it, this is reasonable on the puppy's part. Up to the time he was adopted, your puppy has probably never been alone in his whole life – even when mom wasn't around, he would have been surrounded by siblings. So it will be a shocking new state of affairs to find himself completely alone. Moreover, it's a natural adaptation for puppies to cry if they're alone. Without human intervention, if a puppy is suddenly without his mother or any of his siblings, he's probably in big trouble, and he'd better let mom know where he is double quick so she can come get him.

The reality is, though, that there will be times when you have to leave your dog alone – for most families, that will be a good chunk of every day. So it's only fair to prepare your puppy for that alone time, and to make it not just acceptable, but enjoyable for him to spend time alone.

### Some General Rules for Teaching Your Dog to Enjoy Alone Time

- From the very first day, teach your puppy or dog to love his special crate or “den” and designated long-term secure area (you will only use the den for short-term stays). By using a safe, designated doggy area, you help make the dog feel more secure, and you can control the environment so that he can't make any mistakes. It will help to teach good habits right from the beginning.
- You can teach your puppy/dog to love her special areas by feeding her there, particularly if you use stuffed chew toys, which entertain your dog for a good length of time.
- Begin by leaving the crate door open, not locking the dog inside, and by keeping him in his special area only for short periods of time, so that he doesn't feel overwhelmed. Gradually build up the amount of time that he spends in the long-term area and in his den (but don't initially confine him to his den for more than about one hour at any one time except over night).
- Don't make special exceptions from the beginning—from the first day, think about what your dog's day will be like and begin to get her accustomed to that routine.
- Your puppy or dog should be fed ONLY FROM HOLLOW CHEW TOYS for at least the first few days. Eventually, you can begin to split up your dog's ration between stuffed chew toys and hand feeding, but at first it is more important that you use the chew toys to help your dog learn to love his den and long-term safe area.
- Give your dog lots of stuffed chew toys when he is in his den or long-term safe area so that he can occupy and settle himself, and so that he shapes himself into a “chew-toy-aholic.” That way, not only are you helping him to settle down and enjoy alone time, you're also teaching him what to chew on when he needs a good chew and how to occupy his free time properly.
- Be sure that your puppy or new dog is not in an overly stimulating environment for the first few weeks that she's home. Either put her in a quieter part of the house or cover her den with a blanket so that she's not overwhelmed with activity and she can settle down more easily.

- Overnight, cover the den with a blanket and perhaps put the den near your bed. At first, even if eventually he will sleep with you in the bed, he should be confined to his den – it is very easy for a puppy to wander off and chew or eliminate while you're sleeping soundly. For the first few days, expect that the puppy or new dog may whine at first when you go to bed. They should be near you so that they can smell and sense you, but don't go take him out of the crate, which will accidentally reinforce the whining. If left alone, the whining will usually go away by itself after about four days.
- Overnight while their metabolism is slowed-down; you should preemptively take the puppy out for potty breaks every four to six hours. Set your alarm so that the puppy doesn't have to cry to wake you up for a potty break.

For more detailed instructions on Alone Time please read Dr. Ian Dunbar's "After You Get Your Puppy" which is available at the Open Paw Store, [www.openpaw.org](http://www.openpaw.org).