

Home Alone

Dogs are social animals. As a result, many puppies do not like to be left alone. Young dogs from 8 to 14 weeks of age are simply verbal during this period when isolated. If the behaviour is ignored when presented, it will dissipate over time until your puppy outgrows this period. Socialising your puppy is an important aspect of building his self-confidence.

Using a Crate

If you are concerned about leaving your puppy in the crate, it may help to know **young dogs need to sleep about 18 hours a day!** Even when you are home with your puppy, it is a good idea to put him in the crate a few times a day so he gets the rest he needs and you can control his environment.

If your puppy has had a chance to become comfortable in the crate while you are home, this will also help him become more comfortable when you leave. When you put your puppy in the crate, use **one special toy** your puppy gets only when he is in there. Hard rubber toys that you can put treats into will give him something to work on while awake in the crate.

Before putting your puppy in the crate, always **give him an opportunity to relieve himself**. This way, you will know if he starts to whine, cry, or bark when you put him in the crate it is not because he needs to relieve himself. It is because he does not want to be left alone. Your puppy is verbally trying to tell you to open the door of the crate to let him out.

Opening the crate for a barking, crying, or whining puppy is a big mistake. Since puppies are constantly learning, you will be teaching him that every time he cries, you will open the crate and let him out. If your puppy has not been properly introduced to the crate or you have any questions about crate training, please let us know and we can give you some helpful information on crate training.

When you are feeling guilty about leaving your puppy alone or in the crate, your puppy will pick up on what you are feeling. ***Long good-byes before leaving the house will only add to the problem.*** Without realizing it, you could be instigating the concerned or stressed behaviour.

Medication and Homeopathic Therapy

You may want to consider medication or homeopathic therapy for your puppy if he becomes concerned when left alone. Ask your vet which product would work best for your puppy.

Using a T-shirt

Another way you can boost your puppy's confidence is with the help of a T-shirt. T-shirts give your puppy a better feel of his own body and help him to relax. The T-shirt should go over his head and fit snugly on him. You want a T-shirt that goes all the way down to the end of his rib cage. If necessary, cut the sleeves on the T-shirt so they do not confine his

front legs. This way, when the T-shirt is on, it will allow him to move around freely and will not be uncomfortable. Shirts that have spandex in them are great for this.

Put the T-shirt on the puppy for 15 minutes the first time, and then you can gradually work up the length of time until he can wear his T-shirt all day. Once your puppy is comfortable with the shirt, start putting it on him 10 to 15 minutes before leaving the house. To further ensure his self-confidence with being left alone, start using the T-shirt along with a confidence course you can put together at home.

Desensitization

Another way to address your puppy's concerns is to desensitize him to you leaving the house. You can accomplish this by first breaking down what you actually do before you leave the house. Once you understand your **pattern**, you can begin to habituate him to each of the steps you take.

If your pattern is to put your shoes on before you walk out the door, then put your shoes on and stay in the house. At first, he may become very concerned about you putting your shoes on. However, when you stay in the house, he will realize you are not leaving, and he will settle down. After a little while, take your shoes off. A half hour later, put your shoes back on again, but stay in the house. Repeat this exercise a few times a day until your puppy ignores you when you put your shoes on.

If the next step in your pattern is to grab your keys, then begin the key-grabbing habituating just like you did the shoes. Repeat each pattern you offer before leaving the house separately until he becomes comfortable with every step. Once he is comfortable with the separate steps, it is time to walk out of the house.

Remember to **not give any long good-byes**. Walk out of the house for just a minute, and then return inside. Once he is quiet, let him out of the crate. Repeat this exercise a few times a day, *extending the time you leave him alone*. In time, he will realise that when you leave, it does not mean you are leaving him forever. It just means you are leaving for a little while. Once he is comfortable knowing you will return, his anxiety should dissipate.

If you have tried all of the suggestions in this hand-out and your puppy is still distressed when left alone, please contact our practice to discuss additional options.



If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us