

**Alone training with Your dog**

A lot of dogs will have gotten used to being with their owners during the recent lock down period and for pups and new rescue dogs this period has been beneficial for bonding.
Dogs are social and they love to be around their family group but there comes a point when you have go out shopping or go back to work and you have to leave your dog, how on earth do you do that without them suffering total fall out? Some dogs are perfectly happy with being left, others need a little more help and have only mild separation problems while others being left seems to be the end of the world for them causing them to bark, howl and possibly destroy the house. This could be fear of missing out or a case of separation anxiety only a professional can properly diagnose this for you.

There are caveats in all training and each dog reacts differently. these are simple methods that can be adjusted to suit each dog,
It is important in more severe cases to get a Vet check-up and consultation with a qualified trainer/behaviourist.

**How do we set our dogs up to be happy alone**?

We’ll be using desensitisation and counter conditioning we aim to get the dog used to being alone and change any negative feelings about being alone.
We are encourage calmness and may use a lot of food rewards.

You may also want to purchase an indoor Wi-Fi CCTV camera

It’s important to note that progress can be slow and in the more extreme case you will need a behaviourist and a Vet.

**The flitting game**

This is a simple game that may work for pups and some older dogs with less severe symptoms.
It involves you having two rooms to use and setting a timer for 5 minutes.
for example room one your living room and room two your kitchen.

* Get up from room one where you are with your dog and walk to room two and set the timer fore 5 minutes.
* In this five minutes you fiddle around with something, make a cup of tea, or dust or just move things around do not make contact with your dog in this time.
* When the alarm sounds go back to room one with your dog.
* Do this a number of times throughout the day so you are flitting between the two rooms and you will notice over a period of time that
* your dog will start to pay less attention to your movement between these two rooms
* When you flit to another room and your dog doesn’t follow you, return to your dog after the 5 minutes is up and reward them.

You can then start to do the same in other rooms around the house for longer time periods before you eventually do the same with the front door where you can then start to build up time outside with your dog alone inside. You may wish to do this while watching them on a camera.

**What if the dog has a more severe separation problem?**

in this instance you may consider calling in a behaviourist. You also do not want your dog to be left alone at all during the process of alone training, if you need to go out for any reason before you have gotten your dog to a point where you can leave it, you will need to have someone sit with them.

Things you will need to do

have lots of food rewards – food promotes the production of the body’s happy hormones serotonin and dopamine

Internal WI-FI CCTV camera – to watch them as you start to leave them

Give them a safe place – a crate, a pen or a room you can separate areas off with baby gates, this also means you can control the area.

make the space positive - with the use of enrichment toys such as stuffed kongs, snuffle mats, egg boxes and toilet roll tubes can also be used.

tasty reward - the food we use has to be worth it for your dog something high value and rewarding.

Play some calming music – resent research has shown that music can calm a dog
link to 3 hours of music on YouTube - <https://youtu.be/joe-ePqCqWc>

Get an Adaptil diffuser or spray – This is calming hormones that are given off by lactating dams, that have been shown to help calm dogs and cats.

Get them used to these things while you are there so that anxiety levels stay low, teach them to lay down and settle in this place and occupy themselves with their enrichment toys. Join them in the room reading a book or doing some work, something were you are also calm.

Once you have done this for a few day’s and your dog is getting used to its happy calm place you can start to get up and move around the room.
Set up the enrichment devices but with less rewards hold some back so that as you move around you can drop a few in to the devices. Get up and get a book, go and pick something up or do a little dusting, any kind of movement so that your dog is rewarded by not feeling it has to follow you.

Now you can start to get your dog used to your pre departure cues. These are all signs that you are going out they can add to a growing anxiety for your dog before you have even left the house.

 It’s an idea to list these things before you get started so that you know when you reward your dog.
Here are some examples

* putting your shoes on
* putting your coat on
* picking up your car key’s,
* picking up your hand bag or wallet
* Locking the back door.

Once you have this list you can start to pair these activities with dropping the food in the enrichment devices for your dog, as you were doing in the previous step, so we are changing the dogs view of these cues, they’re no longer the cue for anxiety but the cue for something yummy. You will be doing this a few times a day so that your dog becomes more interested in the rewards than following you around.

Once your dog is happy with your pre departure cues you can start to move towards the front door. Initially you will just be opening and shutting the door this noise may attract your dogs attention, if it does walk back with it to the enrichment devices and drop some more food and take your coat etc off again.
You can do this 5 times a day until your dog stops coming to the front door.

This is where you may find the use of an internal wifi CCTV camera in that you can view on a mobile device is useful.

You will now be heading out of the door and building the time you are outside up, this will be in seconds initially
5 seconds 5 times a day after all of the pre departure cues and setting up the enrichment devices. When you come in calmly walk towards the enrichment devices and place more food rewards there and calmly greet your dog.

Now you can start to build up the time you leave your dog slowly in increments of 5 seconds. If at any point you notice your dog starts to become distressed go back to them calmly and reduce them time you leave them back down to where they were successful for a little longer a day or two and then try increasing the time again.

**But what if this doesn’t work?**

More severe cases that have been going on for some time may need some extra help, this is when a vet and behaviourist will work together with you to look at your dogs diet and offer natural calming supplements such as Caseozepine (Zylkene), L -Theanine, L-Lysine or probiotics.
If these supplements don’t work then Prescription medication can then be considered from your Veterinarian. This medication is known as SSRI or Serotonin reuptake inhibitor they increase serotonin levels and stop the nerves taking that serotonin back so the happy feeling is maintained for longer keeping the dog calmer and helping them to cope with separation. Fluoxetine is the most commonly used and mentioned but there are a number of medications that can be used and your vet will take into account your dogs case with the information provided by the behaviourist and their own health notes to find the best medication and dosage.
The supplements or medications are not a miracle cure in themselves they are to be used alongside a training programme such as the one mentioned above that a behaviourist will work through with you.