



INDEPENDENCE TRAINING

(SEPARATION ANXIETY PREVENTION)

Too Much Togetherness?

Dogs are social creatures and constant companionship seems like it would be the best thing in the world for them. But there's an unfortunate downside: if your dog doesn't learn early in your relationship how to be okay with your departures and absences, she'll be at high risk for owner-absent distress, or even full blown separation anxiety. These are difficult behavior problems to resolve. The good news is that you can prevent these issues by helping your pup-dog learn how to be more independent.

What Is Independence Training?

Teaching your dog how to be okay when left alone, whether it's in her crate, in your house, in your yard, in your car, or in the care of a friend or pet professional are all forms of Independence Training. Some dogs are independent by nature and have no problem adjusting to your absence; others are much needier and never let you out of their sight. Regardless of your dog's temperament, practice these exercises so your dog gains the skills to cope whenever you're not around. If you have a young puppy, this program closely mirrors what you'll find in our handouts on *Housetraining and Management*.

How To Practice:

To practice, you'll need a Confinement Area: a safe, dog-proof location where your pup-dog hangs out while you practice short departures. The ideal confinement area has easy-to-clean flooring (no carpets) and can be closed off with a baby gate. You can also use a portable training pen. The best places for a confinement area are the kitchen, the laundry room, a bathroom, or an empty spare room.

- Step 1: Take your pup-dog out for a short walk or quick bathroom break.
- Step 2: Place him in the confinement area with a chewie or a stuffed Kong. Leave him alone for a few minutes while you go about your business inside the house.
- Step 3: After 5 minutes or before he finishes his chew toy, let him out of the area briefly. Supervise him closely, but don't make a big deal about it or make a fuss over him.
- Repeat Steps 1 to 3: Do this several times in the same day, gradually increasing the time you leave your puppy in his confinement area without leaving the house. Vary the length of your indoor absences, from 30 seconds to 20 minutes, and repeat often throughout the day.
- Step 4: Within the first few days, start leaving the house for short intervals like going to the mailbox, checking the laundry, or taking out the trash. Gradually work up to longer absences (15 to 30 minutes max). Keep track of your time increments and listen for any vocalizing. If all goes well, repeat these each day gradually building up to 1 hour of alone time.
- At Night: If you don't want to share your bed with your pup-dog, and he is not fully potty trained, we recommend leaving him in his confinement area during the night. He may whine or cry. This is normal especially in the first several days. Do one last potty break, then put your pup-dog to bed with a Kong or chewie while you settle down nearby. Once he's settled, leave him quietly and put yourself to bed. If crying persists, rearrange sleeping quarters so your pup sleeps near you for several nights. When you're further along you can gradually migrate sleeping areas back to normal locations.



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When Can I Leave My Dog for an Extended Period?

For best results, wait until your pup-dog has built up to 1 hour of alone time very consistently and without any apparent distress. When you think he's ready for some longer test runs, make sure he has some serious exercise and a potty outing first. Then leave him in his confinement area with a chew toy or Kong and depart for more than an hour. If all goes well, increase each outing in 15 minute increments.

How Do I Really Know If He's Okay?

If you're worried about whether your pup-dog is actually okay alone, we recommend setting up a web-cam to monitor the confinement area. Replay the footage when you return or set up a live feed to your smart phone with a simple app. This is the single best way to collect information about what your dog is doing. If you see signs of distress, or you're not sure what you see, then you'll have observable behavior to share with a professional trainer. This makes it much easier to diagnose and treat.

Other Things To Support Independence

- Teach your dog a strong Stay on his bed and reward him for holding it as you walk further away into the next room.
- Put your dog in his confinement area with an excellent chewie while you do chores.
- Increase your dog's circle of aunts and uncles by having responsible dog friends take him for walks or care for him for short periods while you are out.
- Send your dog out with a professional dog walker on a regular basis.
- Take a training class together—obedience, tricks, agility, freestyle, etc. The more things your dog learns, the more confidence he will gain.

Need More Help?

If your dog has already had negative experiences with being left alone for too long, or is showing clear symptoms of distress such as vocalizing non-stop, destruction around exits, and eliminating indoors despite potty breaks, then you will need professional help. Please contact us if you'd like a trainer to work with you privately on independence training, or visit our website if you'd like to schedule a consult with the BravoPup Hotline to discuss what you're already doing. Let us help problem-solve your situation so your dog learns to cope whenever you are away.