

Home Alone

It is very convenient for families to leave their dog home alone. Like all skills, staying home alone takes some thoughtful and consistent training, especially in the first months you bring your new dog or puppy home.

Where Will Your Dog Stay?

Your dog needs a safe place to stay while you are gone. We want to teach our dogs that when you are gone, they should sleep and chew some appropriate toys, so access to the whole house is usually not a good choice for a new dog. More space means the dog will spend time exploring, not sleeping.

Here are three “sleep zones” I recommend:

- 1) Crate-training is the most popular way to teach your dog to stay home alone. A dog that lives in a crate learns to chew the right toys and is encouraged to “hold it” until a proper toilet is available (grass or pads). You should buy a crate that is roomy enough for the dog stand up and to lie on its side (for sleeping).
- 2) Alternatively, you can purchase an exercise pen (ex-pen for short). This will give your dog a bit more room and if you have a puppy, you can offer your dog a spot to “go” when you will be gone longer than they can reasonably “hold it”. The downsides to pens are that very chewy dogs will chew your flooring and some dogs will jump out (there are no roofs on ex-pens).
- 3) Finally, you can choose a small room. This could be a small kitchen space, a bathroom, or a laundry room. Again, you want a small space that doesn’t have anything you don’t want your dog to chew and is small enough to encourage your dog to rest.

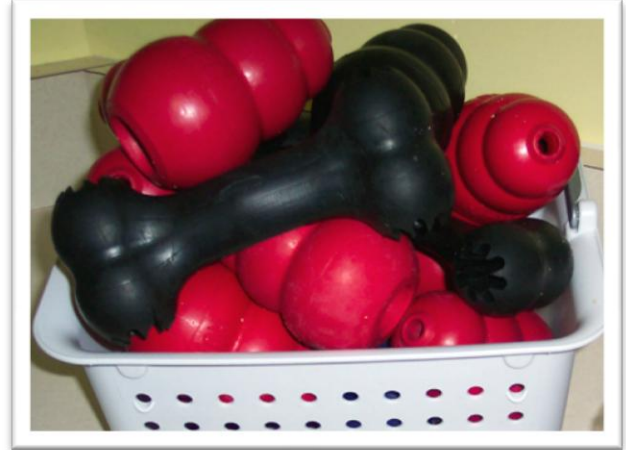


Different dogs will do better with different sleeping spots. There will be some guessing and testing involved.

Teaching Your Dog To Sleep in His Spot.

Whichever location you choose, set your dog up for success. Begin a daily routine that involves exercise before he goes into his sleep spot. This means walking or running your dog before morning errands or work. If you are not working for the summer, it is imperative that your dog learns to rest in his safe-zone (after some morning exercise) so your transition back to work is smooth.

Chew toys act as de-stressors and rewards all at the same time! To capitalize on this, ensure that all chewing takes place in your dog's home alone spot. Buy a selection of safe chewies and continue to spend money on plenty of new chew-toys if you have a dog between the ages of 6 months- 1.5 years. I recommend Kongs or any type of food dispenser over rawhide bones or beef sticks for health, safety, and economical reasons. It is normal to pack between 4-10 Kongs per day.



De-Velcroing Your Dog

A note on when your dog is loose in the house with you: a dog that is directly underfoot at all times can be an indicator that he or she is not confident being alone. You can begin to de-velcro a clingy dog by being observant of your own behaviour:

- Shut your dog out of some of the rooms you enter, especially for short periods. (Your dog doesn't need to be in the bathroom with you!)
- Make sure some of your dog's naps take place in their sleep spot. Escort him to it if need be.
- Make sure all delicious chewing happens in their home alone zone.
- Be careful to downplay your comings and goings. Long kisses good-bye leaves your dog excited, not ready for sleep.

Graduating your dog to being loose in the whole house (while home alone) means teaching them what to chew, where to toilet, and how to sleep during the day. This is best done by choosing a sleep-training spot and sticking with it until your dog knows the rules and routine (at about 1-2 years of age). Then, you can start with some supervised sleeping on their dog bed and later, sleeping home alone.

Happy Home Alone Time Fido.

