

Home Alone

The following article is taken from Dr. Ian Dunbar's *Home Alone Behavior Blueprint*.



Puppies and dogs will develop bad toilet habits in the house, chewing or destroying of inappropriate items, digging up the backyard, and excessive barking if allowed too much freedom combined with not enough or the right kind of supervision and training during their first weeks at home. Puppies and newly adopted dogs may learn separation anxiety issues if allowed full access to their new owners during these

first few weeks in their new home. These anxiety riddled dogs then become anxious when left at home alone, and they attempt to adapt to the boredom and stress of any confinement by chewing, digging, and barking. Severely stressed dogs can even work themselves up into a frenzy and spend the day circling, and panting.

A Place Just For Them

Dogs are den animals, and they value their own special place. A place for quiet repose, a nice chew with an appropriate toy, and more likely a nap. A dog den, like a crate or cage suitable in size is an ideal training tool. A crate may be used for short-term confinement when you cannot supervise your puppy or dog and it will keep him out of mischief and help prevent them from making potty mistakes, destructive chewing, and inappropriate digging. In addition, the crate may be used specifically to foster confidence and calmness.

Right from the start when you are home you can crate the puppy or dog for short periods, 15-30 minutes, so they can be quiet and you can reinforce household manners. After your dog is trained to the ways of the house they can look forward to enjoying a lifetime with the full run of your house, whether you are home or not.

Training Them to Love Their Special Den

A dog crate is really no different than a child's crib, playpen, or bedroom. The first item on the agenda is to teach your puppy or dog to really enjoy spending time in his their cozy den. Stuff part of the puppy or dog's food into a hollow chew toy (see our *Chewing article*), tie the chew toy inside the crate, and leave the door open so the puppy or dog may

come and go when they want to. Praise your pet when they chew the chew toy and supervise them when if they leave the crate. If inside the crate when the pup has settled down for a quiet chew, you may close the crate door. Next time put the stuffed chew toy inside the crate and shut the door with the pup on the outside. When you see them fuss at the crate to get to their stuffed toy, let the puppy enter his crate and close the door behind them. From then on, always give your pet a stuffed chew toy when confining them to their crate. Your pup will learn that being in his den is for a short time and an enjoyable time.

The Pup Trains Itself

When practicing this at home, always confine your puppy or dog with a variety of hollow chew toys stuffed with moistened dry food and different yummy treats. Confining a dog to a crate with a yummy chew toy is like confining a child to an empty room with a video game.

Dogs Left Alone Need Ways to Pass the Time

Preparing dogs for periods of time when they will be left alone requires teaching them to occupy their time when they are home alone. Every dog requires some form of enjoyable occupational therapy. Teaching chew toy chewing is the easiest and most enjoyable solution.

Dogs are most active at dawn and dusk, and so it is pretty easy to teach them how to calmly pass the time of day. During your puppy or dog's first few days and weeks at home, regularly confine him to a crate with stuffed chew toys. Prepare the pup for your absence when you are present. The pup's early lessons of an established daily routine create a stable and enjoyable environment for years to come. Remember, once your dog is confident, independent, and trained, he may enjoy free range of your house and backyard for the rest of his life with you.