

Wingham

Pet Motel

Heaven scent|boarding kennels & cattery

Easy 'home alone' strategies for your dog

Puppies are born with the need to stay close to mum and their littermates until they're weaned. Being alone just "isn't safe" – and that's a pretty good survival strategy! And that innate instinct is what we are up against when we need to leave our dog at home.

Because separation-related problems are far easier to prevent than they are to repair, implementing these simple strategies early on will help your dog become comfortable with being on their own.

However if you have an adult dog showing signs of anxiety when you leave them, these tips are sure to help too.

Here's how:

1. Create a special "home alone" space for your dog. The placement of this space is crucial. It must be a part of your living space near you. Not away somewhere else like the garage, laundry or outside; these places won't teach your dog what you're wanting him to learn about being able to cope when you're nearby but not accessible.
2. Place a barrier or playpen between your dog's space and the remaining living area. Baby gates are a great investment and available from Bunnings for less than \$100. You'll get this money back in shoes and precious objects that your dog won't be chewing because they're outside his area!
3. Help your dog make a really positive association with his new space by making it a doggie haven.
 - * Have a cosy crate or large box with a blanket covering it, like a den. If there's a door, keep it open.
 - * A bed right next to the gate as your dog will likely want to sit as close as they can to you.
 - * Get creative with placement of your dog's daily intake of food for this area. Hide food in shoe boxes, empty toilet roll and paper towel tubes, and cardboard cartons – yes they'll rip them up and that's the point, they're great fun and free toys that allow your puppy to be a puppy. Stuff the food into Kongs – make them really easy at first – it may take several weeks of helping your dog how to get the food out.



If your dog has been fed generous amounts in a bowl, it may take them a while to become interested in these hidden treasures. Don't worry, so long as you only feed your dog in these new creative ways, once your dog is hungry they are sure to develop a love for sniffing out food that magically appears in their special space.

Introducing your dog to their special space

1. Make sure your dog's needs have been met (toileted and exercised), then...
2. Using an upbeat tone of voice, bring your dog to their special area and present some (not all) your new creations – boxes with food, Kongs, a chew stick or a food scatter – then – and here's the important bit, once your dog is busy with their activities, *calmly move over the barrier without speaking or looking at your dog.*
3. Sit nearby on your sofa or desk and don't look at your dog directly. The goal is to help them learn that this context is normal and that they have



nothing to fear. **Build independence gently, don't force it!**

If your dog cries:

- think about what else you can do to meet his emotional needs - more comfort, more puzzles, teach him fun 'find' games.
- decrease the time of separation and distance between you. Then very gradually build it up each day.
- spend special time with your dog in this space
- don't put your dog in their special space as a punishment.

Once your dog is comfortable in their area, you can gradually build up the time they spend there. Helping your dog develop independence is less about teaching them that sometimes he must be alone "whether he likes it or not." Instead, it's about providing him with all the security he needs while gradually showing him that being alone is perfectly safe.



Contrary to popular belief, you're not helping your puppy become more independent by putting your dog in the laundry or a crate and leaving them to cry.

In fact, setting up your dog's bed in your bedroom will actually help prevent separation-related issues! More security early on means more confidence later.

Have the crate or bed next to you so if he cries, first make sure your dog's needs have been met (does he need to toilet?). Puppies normally sleep huddled closely with their littermates so the warmth of your hand might be all he needs to go back to sleep.

Equally, leaving your dog outside in the yard while you are inside doesn't help build a confidence of being on their own. Why? He knows you're inside and he can be sure you're not going anywhere without him knowing about it.

If your dog is showing signs of separation anxiety – screaming when you leave their special area or destroying the house when you leave – you may need to seek the help of a qualified professional. Wingham has their very own qualified veterinary behaviourist, Dr Louise Rourke who practices out of Wingham & Valley Vets.

- Rosalind Le Bas Walker