

Tips to Avoid Potential Problems Down the Road with Your Newly Adopted Dog or Puppy

Congratulations on your new furry family member! It is so exciting to bring home a new dog or puppy and usually people want to spend lots of time getting to know their newest addition by playing with them, taking them on walks, or maybe having friends over to meet them! Sometimes folks will take a day or two off work to spend extra time bonding with their new family member, but then, it's back to work, to school, or to the everyday life routine.

However, these are not usual times. In light of what is going on with COVID-19/Coronavirus, people are now at home a lot more than usual. You would think all this time at home with the new dog or pup would be great for them – but we need to teach them that once our daily routines return to normal, *theirs are going to change.* We need to prepare them for this transition by showing them that their people will leave and come back, and that this is a normal part of the everyday routine.

Here are some tips to help you avoid having a dog who is anxious or stressed to be alone.

Avoiding Separation Anxiety

1. **Dogs love routine and structure.** When they know what's coming next, life becomes more predictable, and predictability will make your dog feel safer. *Since your routine is most likely very different right now, how can you simulate regular life for your dog?*
 - Use this time to teach your dog the rhythm of what a normal day feels like.
 - All family members should leave the house (without the dog) in the morning around the time they usually would leave. Everyone can go for a walk, take a drive, look at their phones in the driveway, (or whatever it is you'd like to do) just make sure you leave the dog or pup alone for 10 or 20 minutes. *Ideally you can do this a couple times a day.* Then extend the time so your dog gets used to longer stretches alone. If your regular life involves different people leaving and returning at different times you can practice that too.
 - Get your dog used to the routine of what *their* daily activities will be like. For example: in the morning they go out for a potty break, then playtime and a training session, then let them entertain themselves with their toys. ***Routine doesn't mean it has to be an exact schedule, but that the rhythm of the day is similar to what it will be like when life gets back to normal.***



2. Entrances and exits are done without a lot of fanfare.

- Don't make a big deal when you leave your dog or when you come home. Giving long drawn out goodbyes, or super excited returns, will actually make it more difficult for your dog.

3. Crate train your dog or pup.

- Some dogs will already be comfortable in a crate, but most will need to learn that the crate is their “safe place”, a place to go when they want to be left alone, and their place to go when their humans leave.
- It's best to train them to go into their crate on cue (as opposed to forcing them in). *If you're not sure how to do this, a professional positive reinforcement trainer can help.* A professional trainer can help you make the crate a positive place, instead of having negative associations.
 - **Set your dog up for success.**
 - If your dog is nice and tired, and ready for a long nap they will be happier about going in and sleeping (and less worried about you leaving).
 - Make sure your dog or puppy has eliminated so they go in their crate with an empty bladder (for puppies, seek additional information on house training).

This might sound like a lot of work. Maybe you're thinking it would be nice to stay in your pajamas a little longer now that you are staying at home, and you're wondering, “Do I really need to make a point of leaving the dog in the morning each day?”. Maybe some family members are reluctant to do it more than once a day, **but keep in mind your long-term goals.** Following these tips will decrease the probability of your dog developing separation anxiety, which is an issue that takes significantly more work to address. So enjoy your time with your new family member, but let him or her understand that alone time is just a normal part of everyday life.



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