

ISOLATION DISTRESS

NEEDS

- Structured routine/schedule
- Daily (twice a day preferably) play/exercise sessions to release additional energy
- Behavioral medications **A behaviorally savvy veterinarian is highly recommended**

BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION PLAN

1. Bring your dog home at a time when someone can spend a few days with them to ease the stress of the transition.
2. Prepare a quiet, safe space in advance such as a playpen or puppy pen, or a dog-proofed room such as a laundry room.
3. When you bring your dog home, give them a chance to relieve themselves outdoors, and spend 10 to 15 minutes with them in the house under close supervision. Then put them in their pen and stay in the room with them.
4. Stay close at first. Read a book. If they fuss, ignore them. When they quiet, greet them calmly, take one step away, and then return before they have a chance to get upset. Speak to them calmly, then go back to reading. You're teaching them that if you leave, you will return. Other family members should make themselves scarce during this time: your dog needs to learn to be alone.
5. Continue to occasionally step away, gradually increasing the distance and varying the length of time that you stay away, so that eventually you can wander around the room without upsetting your dog. Each time you return, greet them calmly. Every once in a while say "Yes!" in a calm but cheerful voice before you return to them, then walk back to the pen and feed them a treat.
6. After an hour or so, give them a break. Take them outside to potty and play. Hang out for a while. Then go back inside and resume their pen exercises.
7. Begin again, staying near the pen until they settle. More quickly their time, move along steps 4 and 5 until you can wander around the room without generating alarm. Now step into another room very briefly, and return before your dog has time to get upset. Gradually increase the length of time you stay out of the room, interspersing it with wandering around the room, sitting near them reading a book, and sitting across the room reading a book. If they starts to fuss, wait until they stop fussing to move back toward them. Teach them that calm behavior makes you return, fussing keeps you away.
8. Occasionally, step outside of the house. Your goal for the first day is to get your dog comfortable with you being away from them for 15 to 20 minutes; it's usually the first 20 minutes of separation that are most difficult. Vary the times so they doesn't start anticipating your return. Remember to give them plenty of potty and play breaks: every hour for a young pup, every one to two hours for an older dog.
9. On the second day, quickly repeat the warm-up steps, until you can step outside for 15 to 20 minutes at a time, interspersed with shorter separations. On one of your outdoor excursions, hop into your car and drive around the block. Return in 5 to 10 minutes, and calmly re-enter the house just as you have been during the rest of the exercises. Hang out for a while, then go outside and drive away again, for a half-hour ttheir time.
10. Now it's time for an outing. Be sure your dog gets a thorough potty break and playtime, then give them 15 minutes to relax after the stimulation of play. Put a Kong stuffed with delightful treats into their pen, round up the family, and calmly exit the house for an outing of a couple of hours' duration.

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ADDITIONAL TIPS

- Exercise your dog well before you leave. A tired dog has less energy with which to be anxious and destructive. End exercise sessions 20 to 30 minutes before you go, so they have time to settle down.
- Five minutes before you leave, give them a stuffed Kong, marrow bone, or similar goodie to take their mind off your imminent departure.
- Make your departures and returns completely calm and emotionless. Only greet them when they are calm.
- Make your departure routine less predictable so their anxiety doesn't build as you are preparing to leave. Eat breakfast before you shower instead of after. Pick up your keys and put them in your pocket before you take your dog out for their final potty break. Put your briefcase in the car while you're still in pajamas. Make the morning as unpredictable as possible.
- Explore alternative options to minimize the occasions when you do have to leave them alone – doggie daycare may be suitable for some dogs, but not for others. You may be able to find a neighbor, family friend, or dog walking service to check in or stay with them for periods of time.
- Try using Comfort Zone (DAP) plug-ins and sprays in their environment to help ease their anxiety.
- Do not use aversive training equipment (i.e. choke, prong, or shock collars, anti-bark devices, harsh yelling, etc) as this will only create additional anxiety and stress.
- Consider working with a behavior professional to be sure you're on the right path.

SPREAD THE LOVE IF YOUR DOG IS HYPER-ATTACHED TO ONE PERSON

The exercise is called "spreading the love." Everyone must participate in the dog's care and enrichment to learn that everyone in the home predicts wonderful things to avoid hyper-attachment to one person. Why is this important? Dogs who learn that everyone in the home is a potential source of the good stuff will be less inclined to develop anxiety when that one person leaves. Here are some ideas to get you started.

- Encourage everyone in your household to participate in the dog's care: feeding, playtime, cuddles, fun walks.
- Once well outside of their decompression period, book your dog's social calendar by arranging fun outings once or twice a week and take high value treats with you so that other people can give them to your dog.
- Once well outside of their decompression period, hire a pet sitter to come by once a week to take your dog out on fun walks or outings.