

Teaching dogs to be left alone

For even the most dedicated of dog owners there will be times when the dog has to be left alone, even if this is for short periods, whilst shopping or visiting friends. Teaching dogs how to cope with isolation is necessary to prevent problems in later life.

Dogs are by their very nature pack animals and live in groups. They derive many social benefits from this group living including safety, security and access to food and shelter. When they become separated vocalising, is a means of calling for the members of their pack to return. When they do not, they make every effort to find the group themselves and this is when destructiveness or escaping is commonly seen and in extreme cases loss of toilet training with dogs that cannot cope satisfactorily with isolation.

Teaching the dog to be left alone should begin as early in their life as possible and wherever possible within the first week or so of getting the puppy home. Puppies are quite predictable in the rest and sleep routines, generally sleeping after exercise, play or feeding. These are appropriate times to put the puppy in it's bed / resting area and once it is settled down allowing time to rest separate from the family is the start of the separation process. Dogs generally feel safe and secure in den type areas, such as an indoor kennel. Whining and scratching should be ignored if experienced but the use a baby gate between rooms can be a good idea, where the puppy still receives comfort in being able to see the other pack members but is denied direct access. This process should be repeated regularly for the puppy to be able to learn appropriately, gradually increasing the time the dog is left alone.

When you decide to return to your puppy, you must choose a time when the puppy is quiet and relaxed. Entering the room when the dog is barking or whining is rewarding the dog for this behaviour, which is exactly what you're trying to avoid.

Should you return to the home and find that your dog has had an accident or chewed something inadvertently, it is important not to tell off the dog for this behaviour. They will not be able to connect what was probably done some time ago with the telling off. All you will serve to do is punish the dog for you returning home making being left even more daunting the next time. Should accidents occur management steps should be taken to avoid this situation next time. See chewing or house training for advice.

