

Back to Work! What About My Puppy!?

Many people rescued dogs and got brand new puppies during the COVID lockdown believing it to be the perfect time. They were home all the time and could bond and potty train with ease. What lucky dogs to have families that were with them 24/7! Now that the world is returning to “normal” and people are returning to work and school outside their home, these dogs need help to adapt to this change.

One thing to do before you return to work is to crate your dog for a few hours each day **while you are home**. This helps the dog to learn to relax in his crate and not have to be right under your feet all the time. Afternoon is a nice time to do this--after a nice walk and some time together. Give a treat such as a stuffed Kong and ignore attention-seeking behavior. I did this with my own dogs while I was quarantined and it gave them a nice break and a reset for the rest of the day. If you don't use a crate, a tie down (a short leash or cable hooked around a table leg or attached to an eye bolt in the wall) can be used for this exercise; however, NEVER use a tie down when leaving the dog home alone.

If your dog has NEVER been alone, start with short times away, like a trip to the grocery store. If your dog has been crate trained, it may be a good idea to crate him the first time. Give him a nice treat and don't make a big deal when you leave. If you are not using a crate, still give the treat and try to limit how much of your house he has access to, many dogs do better in a smaller area when left alone. Toys and things to chew on are a bonus as long as they are safe while unsupervised. You may want to “Puppy-proof” the area so they can't steal food or destroy anything that is precious.

Be a little sporadic about leaving at the start, not always at the same time, not always for the same duration and not always for longer times. Again, not making a big deal when you leave AND not making a huge deal when you come home. There is no need to rush to him the moment you come in the door. Humans acting anxiously around their dog can often make the dog anxious.

It's also good to get into the habit of walking your dog before you go to work. Taking them out helps them to burn energy and gives them mental stimulation as well.

If you are using a crate, and know your work day is longer than you want him crated, try leaving him loose, realizing lots of other behaviors may occur the first time you try this. Many studies of dog behavior show that the most destructive behaviors happen within the first 20 minutes dogs are left alone. Do not immediately diagnose your dog with separation anxiety. Remember, you never trained him to be alone and it will take time for him to learn.

Some people use cameras to keep an eye on their dog during the day. I think this helps the human be less anxious, which can be a good thing.

As your dog gets used to being alone he will relax more and possibly sleep for a good part of the day. So be ready after your full day of work to spend time walking/exercising/playing with your dog. That's why you got him after all.

