DOG PLUS ME · THE FIX SERIES · NO. 06

The Alone-Time Fix

The step-by-step plan for calm goodbyes, longer absences and a dog who rests while you're out. For teenage dogs, adults and rescues with mild alone-time stress.

Reward-based | The Alone Finder | 14 real-life situations | 10 printables



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START HERE · 2 MINUTES

You don't need to read this whole guide before you next leave the house.

You need the parts that match your dog. Check the first row, then find yourself below and follow that path. Everything else is there when you need it.

IF THIS IS YOU…	READ THIS, IN THIS ORDER
Self-injury, escape attempts, won't eat, distress that never settles, or panic within a minute	Stop here. Vet today, then a DACVB or CAAB (Part 4). This book is not the plan for your dog. If in doubt, film it and show the vet.
Not sure what happens when you leave	Film it first (Ch. 1). That's enough for today. Tomorrow, the Alone Finder (Ch. 2) sorts what the video shows.
Howls, whines or barks soon after you leave, then settles	Ch. 1 today → the Alone Finder (Ch. 2) → the Cover Plan (Ch. 3) → Situation 1. Never leave your dog to "cry it out."
Back to the office soon	Situation 5, and start now, before the change. Then the Cover Plan (Ch. 3) and the Back-to-Office Planner (Printable 9).
The neighbors or the landlord complained	Situation 2 → start the Camera Log (Printable 2) today. General information only, never legal advice.
Accidents only when you're out	Vet first, then Situation 4. Accidents when you're home too? The Potty Training Fix (Situation 13).
Barks at noises and passers-by while you're out	Situation 12, with the view-blocking and masking from the Barking Fix (Ch. 3).
Puppy under 6 months	The New Puppy Playbook (the Gate Game, Ch. 4). This book is for teenage and adult dogs.
Rescue in the first weeks home	The Rescue Dog Roadmap first (Situation 6), then Situation 6 here.

How this guide is different

- **It screens first.** Mild alone-time stress belongs here. Panic belongs with your vet.
- **It films before it fixes.** Bored, Blocked, Bothered or Worried. The Alone Finder (Ch. 2) uses your camera to tell which.
- **It gives you rules, not vibes.** How long each practice trip lasts, when to add a little, and when to go back.
- **It has a plan B.** For the untouched food toy, the keys that set off pacing, the office days and the setback week.

- **It's kind.** No scolding, no "cry it out," no bark collars, and no crating a panicking dog.

> **WHERE THIS COMES FROM**
>
> Every recommendation is based on published guidance from veterinary hospitals and associations, welfare charities and peer-reviewed research, in plain steps. Where sources disagree, we take the safer, welfare-first position. Where a rule is our own, we say so. Sources are listed at the back. This guide is educational and doesn't replace your vet.

HONEST EXPECTATIONS

What's normal: honest timelines

You'll see guides promising "home alone in 10 days." We won't. No reliable source gives an end date for alone-time problems, so we don't invent one. Here's what the sources do say.

WHEN	WHAT'S HAPPENING	WHAT'S NORMAL
The first filmed absence	You film a normal absence and watch at least the first 30–60 minutes	Surprises. Distress, if it comes, often starts within 10 minutes. A calm dog mostly rests
Practice inside the home	Settling while you're busy, then seconds behind an inside door	Start at 1–2 seconds, then 5–10. Add only a few seconds per session. It feels slow. That's the point
Leaving the house	The exit door, then outside, then the car and the driveway	Only once room-level absences are easy. Each new door is a new step, so expect to start shorter
Past about 40 minutes	Longer absences	Steps grow to 5 minutes, then 15. The ASPCA says most anxious responses happen in the first 40 minutes. Never past the 4-hour cap
Keys, shoes and coat (only if your dog reacts)	Cue practice, 3–4 calm reps a day at most	This "may take many weeks," says the ASPCA
After illness, holidays, a schedule change or a scary event	A setback	Normal and fixable. Go back to the last easy step

These are ranges from the sources, not promises. Alone-time problems that are new, sudden or in an older dog need a vet visit before any training.

> OUR HONEST ANSWER TO "WILL HE EVER BE OK ALONE?"
>
> Most mild cases improve over a few weeks of short daily practice. Some dogs need months. You'll see it on camera before you feel it. If nothing shifts in 2–4 weeks, that's your sign to get help, not to try harder (the 2–4 weeks is our rule of thumb).

Our standard: "alone-ready"

"Alone-ready" is our own standard, not a vet or charity one. Your dog is alone-ready after **5 filmed absences in a row** at the length your life needs (never more than about 4 hours), where your dog:

- [ ] rests for most of the time
- [ ] shows no stress signs in the first 30–60 minutes
- [ ] has no red flags
- [ ] greets you calmly

Until then, your dog is "in training," even if things look great. Alone-ready doesn't mean your dog never looks at the door. It means alone time is mostly rest.

Three things that will happen (and are normal)

1. **The camera surprises you.** In one small trial, a puppy paced and howled for hours while its owners thought it slept (a small trial of puppies). Trust the video, not your guess.
2. **A great week, then a bad day.** It's not failure. It's data. Any stress sign means the next trip goes back to the last calm length (Ch. 7).
3. **The bedroom door is easy, the front door isn't.** Skills don't always carry over to a new door, so each new door starts short.

READ THIS IF YOU FEEL TRAPPED

You're not trapped forever.

Maybe you haven't had dinner out in months. Owners say "we feel trapped in our home" and "I have no life outside of the house." Maybe you came home to a note, or you just feel terrible about it.

You haven't failed, and your dog isn't bad. Here's why.

Being alone is a skill

Dogs aren't born knowing that alone is safe. Dogs Trust says dogs can learn that being alone is okay. They learn it a little at a time. They don't "just get used to it."

Problems when alone are distress or frustration. The ASPCA is clear that they're not disobedience or spite. Your dog isn't punishing you for leaving.

You didn't cause this by loving your dog. One study of 400 dogs found "spoiling" activities weren't linked to separation anxiety (one case-control study of dogs seen at a clinic).

You're far from alone

Studies find anywhere from about 1 in 20 to about 1 in 5 dogs show signs, depending on how it's measured. You're far from alone. It's common, it's hard, and asking for help is normal.

How to start again

1. **Drop anything that adds worry.** Scolding the mess, a cold freeze-out, "cry it out." Dogs don't link a telling-off to what happened earlier.
2. **Film first.** Run the Alone Finder (Ch. 2). The fix depends on what the camera shows.
3. **Stop the long absences.** Cover anything your dog can't manage yet (Ch. 3).
4. **Go small and calm.** A quiet goodbye, a calm hello, and practice trips that end before the worry starts (Ch. 7–8).

THIS IS MILD ALONE-TIME STRESS

- Whining, pacing or a few barks at the door soon after you leave
- Then it settles: rests, eats or plays
- Following you around the house, with no panic when you go

GET HELP IF

- Self-injury, frantic escape attempts, or a damaged crate, door or window
- Distress that never settles, or panic within a minute
- Won't eat alone, heavy panting, drooling, trembling, or toileting every time

Right-hand column? That's not your failure either. It means a vet check first, then a DACVB or CAAB. Part 4, "When to get help", says who to call. Get help early, not as a last resort.

THE ONE THING TO REMEMBER

It's OK to ask a friend to dog-sit, or to take your dog along. That's not giving up. Cover is management, not failure. You're reading this page, so you're already doing better than you think.

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