

# Spending Time Alone



**FOREVER HOUNDS TRUST**

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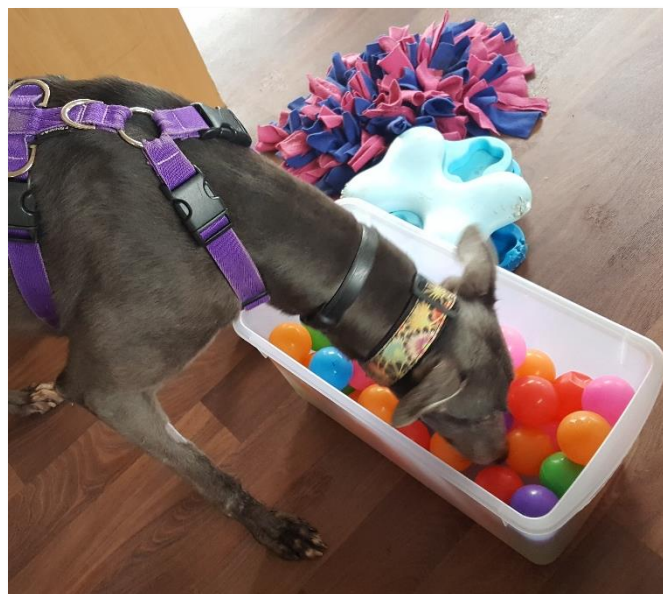
As a social species, it isn't surprising that most dogs are happiest when they have company. Unfortunately, the majority of us have to leave our dogs alone on a regular basis due to work commitments. Even if you're lucky enough not to have to leave your dog regularly, it is still important that you teach your dog to feel comfortable with short periods on their own, so that they will not panic should you ever have to leave them alone unexpectedly.

## *Introducing time alone*

When you first bring your new dog home, you may notice that they're rather clingy! It is totally normal for your newly adopted dog to follow you everywhere, and to show signs of worry when you leave the room. This is because they are in a new environment, feeling unsure and in need of extra social support. No need to panic - this doesn't mean your dog is always going to struggle with time alone!

At this early stage we would advise simply letting your dog follow you around, as preventing them from doing this will cause stress and delay the settling in process. You should see this behaviour naturally start to decrease over the first week or so, as your dog starts to feel more at home.

- Ideally we wouldn't advise introducing time alone until your dog has started to get over this "clingy" phase. Whilst they are feeling unsure at home, they are more likely to struggle with being left. This is why we advise taking time off work when you adopt. Once you notice that your dog is happy to stay snoozing on the sofa whilst you pop to the kitchen, you can start building up time alone.
- Always provide your dog with something to keep him occupied whilst you're gone. This could be a food filled toy, a long lasting chew, a destruction box, or anything else that your dog enjoys. Choose at least one treat which your dog absolutely loves, and save this exclusively for when you leave him alone. This will help him to see time alone as a good thing! As you build up to longer periods alone, you may need to leave a number of enrichment items around the house to prevent your dog from getting bored.
- When building up time alone, the idea is never to let your dog feel distressed. Only increase the amount of time alone if he is comfortable with the previous time period. Start by leaving your dog only for a minute or so before returning. If he is occupied with his treat, you can leave him a bit longer but return as soon as he finishes it.



- Practise leaving your dog every day, gradually increasing the amount of time you leave him before returning. Always try to return **before** your dog starts showing signs of distress. Signs that your dog is comfortable include resting, playing with toys, and eating treats/chews. It is normal for your dog to be unsettled when you first start leaving him, but signs that he is not comfortable include barking, howling, excessive pacing or panting, toileting and destructive behaviour.
- Using a web cam which enables you to watch your dog in real time will make this process much easier. You can watch how your dog behaves whilst you're gone, making sure you return before he becomes distressed. You may be able to build up more quickly than expected if you can see that your dog appears comfortable. There are cameras designed specifically for this, but you could also leave a laptop running, with a video call connected to your phone.
- If your dog does become distressed at any point, you will need to reduce the time alone and increase more gradually as you continue. How quickly you can build time alone up will depend on your individual dog.

## ***Top Tips***

- Leaving a radio on when you leave can help sooth your dog, as well as drowning out any noises from outside which may cause him to feel unsettled. Classical music or audiobooks are ideal for this.
- Many people prefer to restrict their dog to one room when leaving them alone. Most dogs have no issue with this, but some struggle with not knowing what might be happening elsewhere in the house. If your dog is struggling with being left in one room, try giving them the run of the house.
- Try not to make a big fuss of your dog before you leave, or when you return. This will make your absence more obvious! You shouldn't totally ignore your dog either, as this will be punishing for them – just act as you normally would!
- Never tell your dog off for any toileting or destructive behaviour they may have done whilst left alone. They will not connect the punishment with the behaviour they did whilst you were gone. Instead, they will start to feel worried about your return, making them even more distressed whilst you're away.

**If your dog is struggling to get used to time alone, please get in touch with us for free advice and support.**

The information provided in this document provides general guidance on the matters outlined and is not intended to replace the need for you to take qualified and appropriate behaviour/training advice on these matters.

Please remember, that as an owner of a Forever Hounds Trust dog you have access to our team of qualified behaviourists and FREE behaviour and training advice. No matter what your behaviour or training question is, we are here to help. You can contact the team by emailing: [behaviour@foreverhoundstrust.org](mailto:behaviour@foreverhoundstrust.org)

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