

## **Home Alone... Ask a trainer**

By Nan Arthur, CDBC, CPDT, KPACTP

Dear Trainer,

I'm going back to work soon and will now have to leave my dog home alone for about 9 hours each day. We have a doggie door so he can go outside if he needs to go to the bathroom, but I'm worried that he will get bored or lonely and become destructive. My dog is a boxer mix, that is 3-years-old, so he has lots of energy. Do you have any suggestions that would make his days alone more enjoyable? Not that I was looking, but some friends said I should get another dog, do you think might help?

Signed,

*Working Dog Mom*

Dear Working,

This is one of my favorite subjects since my own three dogs have to spend time alone during the day like many other dogs that live with working pet parents. I, like others, don't want my dogs to be bored or to feel lonely, so I have given this subject lots of consideration, which I hope will help you to keep your dog happy during your absence.

I'm glad to hear you have a doggie door for your dog to go out when needed, but that is not always the answer for all dogs. Many tiny dogs with outside access are at risk for dognapping, from coyotes, or hawks if they are small enough. Even large dogs can be in harms way via kids that might find teasing fun, or roaming dogs that might have access to your dog through a fence. It's important to do a quick assessment of your dog's outside space before giving your dog free roam of that area when you are gone.

If you feel your dog will be safe with outside access, some of the main concerns for dogs in the yard during the day, or even with access to both the house and the yard are safety hazards and destructive behaviors.

### ***Dangers and destruction***

Plants, swimming pools, hot tubs, and breaches in fences are among the highest risk factors for dogs in yards. In the home, chemicals, electrical cords and pretty much anything that a dog might, pull, knock over, chew and/or ingest are potential dangers for dogs.

When it comes to destructive behaviors, the main complaints are digging, getting into things like planters, and garbage cans. Chewing things such as garden hoses, couches, rugs, and many a dog's favorite—laundry, are also high on the list of complaints when dogs are left alone. To prevent destructive behaviors and to keep your dog safe, it may take a little creativity on your part, but with some of the following ideas and suggestions, you should be able to avoid coming home to a mess or an injured dog.

### ***Think Resort***

There are bunches of studies being done these days on environmental enrichment for animals. This means that researchers are trying to find ways to take care of the needs of

captive animals so they don't suffer from environmental stress, or boredom. Dogs should be included in this category since they do have to spend a good deal of time, "locked up" in our homes and yards. While it may seem as though you provide the life of luxury for your dog, comfort is in the eye of the beholder. Whichever area you choose for your dog, be sure to practice leaving for short periods, and then increasing to longer periods before you actually have to leave for the full nine hours. You can use a "nanny cam" or other video device to see how your dog is doing while you are gone if you are really worried. You might be surprised to find that most dogs just rest and sleep when their humans are away.

Making your dog's space (inside or out) as wonderful a place for your dog as possible during your absence, should eliminate some of the problems associated with boredom and stress. Be sure to "think resort."

### ***Inside or out?***

Where will your dog stay when you are away should be the first question you answer. Has your dog always been inside during the day, or does your dog do fine being outside for the times when you are away from the home? Since your dog has had access to both areas, via the doggie door, he does have the perfect set up in terms of his personal space as long as there are none of the afore mentioned hazards.

Your dog may choose to spend more time in one location or the other, so plan ahead and make both areas doggie nirvana by adding fun and constructive activities to each.

The following are some ideas to make both indoor and outdoor areas wonderful for your dog:

- Provide a place for your dog to dig if he enjoys digging—provide a digging area that you "plant" with toys, food and bones so when your dog digs there, he is rewarded by buried treasures.
- Leave something with your scent in your dog's sleeping area.
- Use Canine Lullabies [www.caninelullabies.com](http://www.caninelullabies.com) to sooth your dog during your absence
- DAP—the doggie pheromone can be very claming for many dogs
- Hide your dog's food—forgo feeding your dog his entire meal in a bowl and come up with ways for him to search for his food. A simple way to accomplish this is to scatter his meal around the yard so he has to scavenge for his food. You can also use Kongs and other food carrier toys to keep him busy for a while. After he expends all that energy, he should be more willing to take a nap or rest, rather than worry about what to do next.
- Use Buster Cubes or treat balls to feed your dog so he really has to work at getting his meal—again, this will provide him with mental and physical exercise that will find him resting after such a hard workout.
- Add a baby pool to the outside area where your dog can cool off when it's hot, and add some Kongs to the water that are stuffed with Kong Stuffing or peanut butter (go easy on these) drop them in the pool so your dog can "fish" them out and then lick them clean.

- Leave good chews, such as pressed rawhide or Bully Sticks (be sure to watch your dog with these before leaving them unsupervised) so he has something to work on while you are gone.
- Exercise is another way to encourage your dog rest after you leave. Using a balance of physical and mental exercise (Kongs, and the above-mentioned ideas are examples of mental exercises) is important so you don't overtax your dog's physical state by doing too much. A good brisk walk before you leave should do the trick with most dogs, however, if your dog is used to a higher level of exercise, be sure to meet that need before you leave each day.
- Also consider a professional dog walker, doggie daycare or coming home for lunch to help break up the day for your dog, since 9 hours is a lot of time for a dog that has had you around up until now.

As far as getting another dog-- friends with good intentions are usually not the ones that have to live in the situation. The only reason to get another dog is that you want another dog. I love multi-dog households, but it wouldn't serve your current dog if you are struggling to find the time to keep him happy. Two dogs require twice the time if you are going to fulfill each dog's impendent, emotional needs, so unless you really want, and have time for a second dog, work on keeping your current dog happy with the time you do have.

Good luck,  
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