



## Home Alone 2: Life after Quarantine

If your dog has gotten used to having you around during the COVID-19 shelter in place restrictions, transitioning to leaving them home alone may be stressful. Making this process gradual now may help prevent separation distress once stay at home restrictions ease. Here are some tips and tricks to use with your dog during the COVID-19 quarantine to ease into spending stretches of time home alone. Help them prepare for life after quarantine!

- **Provide a food or puzzle enrichment item (such as a stuffed Kong) before you leave.** Give them these puzzles at other times during the day as well so they do not associate the food with being left alone. If it is your dog's first time using a Kong, make the puzzle easy by putting loose treats or kibble inside that will easily fall out. Once your dog is a pro, pack in wet ingredients, such as wet food or peanut butter. Next, freeze Kongs stuffed with a variety of ingredients in advance. There is a whole world of food puzzles; [check out the behavior resources section on our website for a more comprehensive list!](#)
- **Offer appropriate outlets for natural behaviors throughout the day.** Make sure to offer them *appropriate* outlets so they don't go looking for inappropriate ones! Put some treats in a delivery box and tape it closed with masking tape (or other paper-based tape). Tightly roll a long sheet of cardboard into a "churro" with some peanut butter smudged inside and tape it tight. Instant appropriate chew toy! **Nose work games** are another fantastic option. Sprinkle treats or kibble in the grass outdoors or in the yard for your dog to sniff out. Hide some kibble around the house and encourage your dog to "find it!", increasing difficulty slowly.
- **Dog-proof your living space.** If you are going to give your dog appropriate outlets for their natural foraging and chewing behaviors, make sure to block off areas where you do not want your dog to go and put items away that you do not want your dog to get into (such as shoes).
- **Aim to leave the house twice per day.** Even if it is just stepping out your front door and right back so it's "no big deal," spending a few minutes in the yard, going to the mailbox and back, or walking around the block. Begin to vary to amount of time that you leave them alone if they appear relaxed.
- **Set them up in a separate room for a little while each day with some enrichment.** If this is too stressful for your dog, start by separating them using a baby gate. Build up to leaving them in a separate room with the door shut for short periods of time. Gradually build duration. Begin to vary the amount of time they spend alone if they appear relaxed.
- **Create (or reinforce!) a comforting safe space for your dog.** This can be a well-loved dog bed, an open crate, a specific spot on the couch or by a window, wherever your dog feels most at ease. Equip this space with enrichment to encourage them to relax there.
- **Exercise your dog before alone time.** End exercise sessions 20 to 30 minutes before you go, so they have time to settle down. If walks aren't an option, look into a Flirt Pole (aka Woof Stick)!
- **Teach them calming activities so they get used to relaxing on their own.** Teach your dog new skills such as "relaxation on a mat" or teach them to LOVE spending time in their crate relaxing.
- **When coming and going—be boring.** If your dog gets excited and jumps all over you when you return, ignore them. Turn your back or walk away, put away your keys, take off your shoes etc. When they show less intensity, say hello and greet them very calmly.
- **Practice your pre-quarantine departure routine out of context.** Think of the things you do before leaving the house and practice them out of context. Pick up your keys, put them back on the table, put on your shoes, take them off. Put on your backpack, put it down. Get dressed to leave, hang out on the couch. Help break up these pre-departure signals for your dog.

**Suspect your dog has a more serious form of separation distress or anxiety?**

For more information and behavioral support, contact our behavior department at [www.eastbayspca.org/behaviorhelp](http://www.eastbayspca.org/behaviorhelp)