

## CFR Secrets for Success

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### Home Alone

An essential part of a puppy raiser's job is to teach the puppy good house manners and eventually condition the pup to being left alone loose in the home without being destructive or distressed. The goal is to send a young dog into formal training that is reliable in the house if left unattended for a couple of hours. Some dogs may only reach half an hour in one puppy-proofed room; others we can expect to be reliable for several hours with freedom in the whole house. The dog's individual temperament will affect the progress of training to be 'home alone'.

While the young dog is undergoing formal training on campus there is little opportunity for the trainers to proof house behavior. The dogs may be tested for short periods in the observation room but there is no time or opportunity to teach these dogs what they should already know about living in a home. The instructors trust that the youngsters come in for guide training knowing how to behave in a home environment.

Under 'essential behaviors' in the training techniques section of the Puppy Raising Manual you will find information on how to teach house manners and start leaving the puppy home alone, at first in a crate of course. The puppy must prove himself trustworthy when you are present before attempting to leave him alone uncrated. Here are some additional tips and guidelines:

#### **Before Introducing 'Home Alone'** (not crated, alone in the house)

- The puppy should no longer need a drag-line to correct or prevent undesirable behaviors.
- If the puppy still attempts to pick up inappropriate items or is investigating food smells etc in your presence then he is not ready to be left alone.
- The puppy should show calmness and reliability as you move from room to room around the house and he is not right beside you. Puppies still needing direct supervision are not ready to be introduced to home alone.
- It is difficult to say at exactly what age 'home alone' should begin because much depends on the individual pup's propensities. We do not want to risk the puppy ingesting something that would make him ill so he must prove to you that he is ready; for some pups this may be as young as 6-7 months and for others it may be as late as 12 months.

#### **First Steps**

- Choose a room that the puppy is very familiar with for his first times alone. Leaving him in a less familiar room may cause anxiety leading to chewing behavior. If he is respectful of X-pens and/or baby gates these can be utilized to cordon off open areas in place of closed doors.
- Pick up the room/area so that nothing tempting or dangerous is available for him to chew on.
- Make sure he is exercised, relieved, calm and relaxed before you leave him.
- Give him a new or favorite approved toy to occupy him.
- Don't make a big deal about leaving, just nonchalantly leave and go to another part of the house.

- Return after just a few minutes in the same relaxed way. Come and go a few times if he seems comfortable.
- Keep praise low key; too much excitement upon your return will create anticipation of it the next time you leave and can actually lead to behavior issues.
- Once going into different areas of the house for five minutes or so is accomplished, you can do the same but go outside into the yard. Peeking through windows will allow you to observe his behavior but may also lead to him peeking back!

Of course you cannot correct any misbehavior if you don't catch the pup in the act but hopefully he will be settled and busy with his toy the few minutes that you are away. It is best to build up the time slowly, with short, frequent exposures and make it a positive learning experience for the puppy. Should he get into something while you are gone do some set-ups with that temptation while you are there and make the next 'home alone' time very short, checking back frequently— set him up for success.

Going to the mailbox or doing yard work are good opportunities to practice leaving your pup alone in the house. Remember to build the time up slowly and only gradually give him more responsibility around personal belongings. The first few times you actually drive away and leave your pup loose it would be wise to go back several steps in the training (e.g. leaving for only a very short time in one puppy-proofed room) and make it easy for him to settle. Many dogs are unsettled when the owner drives off without them until they realize that someone will be back shortly. This would also be a good time to give him that novel toy to occupy him!

Some puppies will take longer than others to be trustworthy house dogs and really busy pups are the most challenging to settle enough to be left for very long. Some pups will seem to do fine for several months then have a regression as they mature. In this case you would go back to using a crate and teaching set-ups until the pup has proven to be ready for more 'home alone' time.

If you have any questions about teaching your puppy to stay home alone, please talk to your leader and/or Community Field Representative.

Thank you for raising our puppies and teaching them all they need to know to be good house dogs!