



Isolation and Behavior Problems

Most dog guardians remember having a dog when they were a kid ... their dog followed them places, slept somewhere, and never chewed up toys, clothing, sprinkling systems or fences. That's why many people want to get a dog - to return to their past, or to give their children what they had ... love, affection, companionship.

But most homes today are not like homes of yesteryear. In many, if not most, families these days both parents work, the children go directly from school to after-school activities, and weekends are one activity after another. Who exactly is at home to take care of man's best friend? In all likelihood, **no one**.

No one walks the dog every day, no one grooms the dog regularly and, for that matter, no one just hangs out with the dog. And the dog needs that attention to grow, mature, and learn what behavior is acceptable.

Several major problems arise from situations like these. First, left alone for 10 hours or so, an active young dog has to do *something*. Reading is out of the question...visiting friends is generally impossible...going to the gym - well, there aren't that many places for canine calisthenics these days. So what's left? **Chewing** - the doggy equivalent to biting one's nails. **Digging** - a reasonably fun activity usually followed by punishment. **Escaping** - there must be *something* to do somewhere. And **Barking** - letting everyone know about the bird that's flying over your property - at length. That one often ends up in human court.

Unfortunately, there is no magic pill to give your dog that will make him happy to be left alone for most of his life. there are some things you can do to help however.

Before you get a dog, realistically assess your time availability. If he or she will be alone for 10 or more hours a day, with little or no routine exercise, are you sure you really want a dog? Perhaps something a little less demanding, like a bird or fish tank would be more appropriate. If you already have a dog, set up a daily schedule that allows your dog as much time with you as possible. Your dog is a pack animal, and absolutely needs to be with his pack to know his place, and to learn to behave.

Here are some suggestions:

Get up early, and take your pup on a long, brisk walk or run (good for you, too!) Walk him again when you get home or, if you can't, hire a dog-walker (better than nothing). Have him sleep in your bedroom (8 hours of free time with you either in a crate or, if he's trustworthy, on the floor beside your bed.

Take your dog to a class. He'll probably enjoy it, and you may too. Try to let him get used to your absences slowly. Leave with little fanfare and come back 15 minutes later, then half an hour later, then an hour, and so on. Don't make a big deal of leaving, or returning. Too much emotion at either occasion creates anxiety, which in turn causes anxious activities like chewing or digging. If he's to be left outside put him out five minutes or so before you leave, perhaps giving him something to chew on that will keep him busy for a while. When you return, don't immediately open the door and greet him. Wait a few minutes, then walk outside as though you've been there all along and finally... If you have a puppy, remember that adulthood comes later than you think (as late as three years for larger dogs), and along with maturity comes the ability to sleep for up to 20 hours a day!

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