

Home Alone

An essential part of a GDB puppy raiser's job is to teach the puppy good house manners. As the puppy matures it should be introduced 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 alone in one puppy-proofed room; others may be reliable for several hours with freedom in the whole house. The dog's individual temperament will affect how quickly it can be left "home alone". (See document "Final Goal Behaviors")

When the young dog comes into the GDB kennels for formal training there is little opportunity for the trainers to proof house behavior. The dogs may be tested for short periods in home settings 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 even when left unattended.

Reference documents for teaching house manners:

Teaching Good House Behavior

Preventing Destructive Behavior

Teaching Settled Behavior in the Home

Preventing Counter Surfing

Before Introducing "Home Alone" (not crated, alone in the house)

- If the puppy still attempts to pick up inappropriate items or is investigating food smells etc. in the raiser's presence, then it is not ready to be left alone.
- The puppy should show calmness and reliability as the raiser moves from room to room around the house. Puppies still needing direct supervision are not ready to be left alone.
- The puppy should no longer need a drag-line to prevent or interrupt undesirable behaviors.
- It is difficult to say at exactly what age the puppy should be left loose in the house because much depends on the individual pup's propensities. We do not want to risk the puppy engaging in inappropriate behaviors so it must prove that it 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

- A room that the puppy is familiar with should be chosen for first times alone. Leaving the pup in a less familiar room may cause anxiety leading to chewing behavior.
- If the pup is respectful of X-pens and/or baby gates these can be utilized to cordon off open areas in place of closed doors. (Only to be used if the raiser is present in another part of the house.)

- The room/area should be picked up so that nothing tempting or dangerous is available for the pup to chew on.
- The pup should be exercised, relieved, calm and relaxed before being left.
- The pup may be given a new or favorite approved toy to keep it occupied.
- At first the raiser should just nonchalantly leave and go to another part of the house.
- The raiser should return after just a few minutes in the same relaxed way. The raiser should come and go a few times if the pup seems comfortable.
- Praise should be kept low key; too much excitement upon the raiser's return will create anticipation the next time the raiser leaves and can actually lead to behavior issues.
- Once the pup is comfortable alone while the raiser goes into different areas of the house for five minutes, the raiser may go outside into the yard.

The amount of time alone should be built up slowly. Short, frequent practices make it a positive learning experience for the puppy. Should the puppy get into something when left, the raiser should do some set-ups with that temptation when present or when in another room close by. Small bells attached to the object or placed in a garbage can, will alert the raiser to the puppy's transgression and the raiser can immediately give a verbal interrupter, "Ay!" from the other room. Puppies with busy natures need especially thoughtful introduction to being home alone!

Going to the mailbox or doing yard work are good opportunities for raisers to practice leaving the pup alone in the house. Raisers should be aware of passing time and only gradually give the pup more responsibility around personal belongings.

The first few times the raiser actually drives away and leaves the 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). 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 the pup that novel toy to occupy him. If an individual puppy finds it very difficult to settle when the raiser is gone, the CFR may recommend a food-stuffed toy.

Some puppies will take longer than others to be trustworthy house dogs and really busy pups are the most challenging. Some pups will seem to do fine for several months then have a regression as they go through an adolescent stage. In this case raisers are advised to go back to using a crate and training set-ups with careful re-introduction of home alone at a later time.