

7-Day Home Alone Starter Plan

Leaving for work tomorrow? Here's exactly what to do for the next 7 days.

This plan is for dogs who struggle when you leave and owners who work long days. It won't fix everything in a week, and nothing honest can promise that. What it does: shows you where your dog's comfort ends today, gives you short daily practice you can fit before or after work, and helps you cover the workday so you don't undo progress.

The one rule: during practice, come back *before* your dog gets stressed. Small, calm wins build comfort. Pushing past panic sets it back.

Step 1. The baseline test (Day 1, about 10 minutes)

1. Set up a camera: a pet cam, a laptop, or a spare phone on a video call.
2. Do your normal leaving routine and step outside. Start a timer.
3. Watch live. Come back in calmly at the **first** clear stress sign, or after 10 minutes if your dog stays relaxed.
4. Write down the time. That is your baseline.

Relaxed (keep going)	Stress signs (come back now)
Lying down, sniffing around, chewing a toy, settling, a short whine that stops on its own	Pacing, panting, nonstop barking or howling, scratching at the door, drooling, trembling, not touching food

Your practice length = about half your baseline, never more than the baseline. Baseline 2 minutes? Practice at 1. Baseline under 30 seconds? Start with just picking up your keys and stepping to the door.

Why short practice works

Your dog learns from what actually happens, not from how long you're gone. Ten calm one-minute absences teach "leaving is boring and you always come back." One long panicked hour teaches the opposite. That's why the workday plan (page 2) matters as much as the practice: on days your dog is alone past their limit, try to bring in cover.

Step 2. Your 7 days (5 to 10 minutes a day)

Day	When	What to do
Day 1	Evening, after work	Baseline test (page 1). Pick a "calm zone": a gated room or bed spot with water, a chew and a worn T-shirt.
Day 2	Morning, 5 min	Cue practice: pick up keys, put on shoes, sit back down. Repeat 5 to 8 times until your dog barely looks up.
Day 3	Evening, 10 min	3 to 5 short absences at practice length. Walk out, come back calm, no big hello. Wait a minute or two between reps.
Day 4	Morning, 5 min	Same as Day 3, but give a food toy in the calm zone as you step out. If your dog ignores food, the absence is too long. Shorten it.
Day 5	Evening, 10 min	Mix lengths: short, shorter, a bit longer (add 10 to 20%), short. Keep the longest one under the baseline.
Day 6	Weekend or after work, 10 min	Repeat the baseline test. Compare with Day 1. Same or a little better is normal and good.
Day 7	Any time, 5 min	Rest day or an easy round. Plan next week: keep the length that stayed calm and add small steps only after 2 to 3 calm days in a row.

Every exit, every day: a short sniff walk before you leave, a low-key goodbye (or none), a calm return. Wait until your dog settles before greeting.

Step 3. Cover the workday so you don't undo progress

Feeling guilty about leaving your dog is very common. Guilt doesn't help your dog; a plan does. Pick the closest option and adjust:

Budget	Example week (5 workdays)	Good to know
\$0 a week	Ask for 1 to 2 work-from-home days, lunch trips home, family or a friend 1 to 2 days, a dog-owner swap with a neighbor.	Takes asking. Write the schedule down so everyone knows their day.
About \$75 a week	Daycare 2 days (about \$32 each), family or friend 1 day, work from home 1 day, swap or half-day daycare 1 day.	Best for dogs who are fine with other people and dogs.
About \$200 a week	Daycare 5 days (about \$161), or an in-home sitter 3 days (about \$55 each) plus favors.	Most cover, least stress. Look for packages and half days.

Costs are planning estimates from US national averages (Goose 2025 daycare survey; Rover, Sept 2025). Big cities often run higher. Get local quotes.

Step 4. Progress log

Day	Date	Absence length(s)	Calm? (Y / N / signs seen)	Cover used at work	Notes
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					

Baseline Day 1: _____ **Baseline Day 6:** _____ **Next week's practice length:** _____

Progress is often slow, and that's normal

- Some weeks you'll add seconds, not minutes. That still counts.
- Bad days happen (a storm, a late night, a change at home). Drop back to an easy length for a day or two.
- Stuck for 2 to 3 weeks? Make steps smaller, check your cover plan, and consider getting help.

When to talk to your vet or a qualified behavior professional

- Your dog hurts themselves, breaks teeth or nails, or tries to break out of crates, doors or windows.
- Panic starts within seconds, or doesn't improve after a few weeks of careful practice.
- A sudden change in behavior, accidents in a house-trained dog, or other health changes.
- You feel at your limit. Asking for help is a good decision, not a failure.

Your vet can rule out pain or medical causes and discuss all options for your dog. A certified behavior consultant or veterinary behaviorist can build a plan for your specific dog. This guide does not replace either.

General information for everyday training, not veterinary advice. Page 3 of 3 · **made by Alone & Okay**. Want the full step-by-step version? Alone & Okay is our own short course for owners who work outside the home, at aloneandokay.com. This plan works on its own either way.