

First 7 Days Home Alone

A gentle plan to help your newly adopted dog feel safe when you step out

Before you start

- Your dog is adjusting to a whole new world. Some whining, pacing or accidents in week one are normal - be patient.
- Pick a calm 'home base': a quiet room or gated area with water, a comfy bed and something that smells like you.
- Stock up on safe chew toys and food puzzles (stuffed rubber toys, lick mats, snuffle mats).
- Use rewards only: treats, praise and play. Never scold, punish or use shock, prong or spray collars - fear makes alone time harder.

Your 7-day plan

Day 1	Settle in	Stay home if you can. Let your dog explore, sniff and rest. Keep things quiet. Practice stepping into another room for a few seconds and coming back calmly.
Day 2	Tiny absences	Step outside the door for 10-30 seconds, then return without fuss. Repeat a few times while your dog is relaxed. Give a food puzzle as you leave.
Day 3	Build a routine	Walk, play and sniff before alone time so your dog is ready to rest. Try absences of 1-5 minutes. Keep hellos and goodbyes low-key.
Day 4	Stretch slowly	Work up to 5-15 minutes. If your dog stays calm, add a little time; if not, go back to the last easy step.
Day 5	Watch and learn	Record a short absence on your phone or a pet camera. Relaxed lying down = great. Constant crying, scratching or drooling = shorten the time.
Day 6	Mix it up	Practice pre-departure cues (keys, shoes, jacket) without leaving, so they stop predicting goodbye. Try 15-30 minutes if things are going well.
Day 7	Celebrate progress	Aim for a calm 30-60 minutes, depending on your dog. Every dog moves at its own pace - slow progress is still progress.

Helpful habits

- Keep the first real absences short - plan errands for later in week two if you can.
- A tired dog is a calm dog: sniffing walks and food puzzles work better than long runs.
- Leave calming background sound (soft music or talk radio) if your dog likes it.
- Give a special treat that only appears when you leave, and put it away when you return.
- Come home calmly. Wait until your dog settles, then greet and reward.

Signs your dog is coping well

- Lies down or naps within a few minutes
- Eats the food puzzle
- Quiet, or brief whining that stops on its own

Signs to slow down

- Non-stop barking, howling or crying
- Scratching or chewing at doors and windows
- Heavy panting, drooling, pacing or accidents only when alone
- Not eating while you are gone

Common mistakes to avoid

- Leaving for a full workday on day one
- Long, emotional goodbyes
- Punishing messes found later - your dog can't connect it to the past
- Crating a dog that panics in the crate (try a gated room instead)

See your vet

Schedule a check-up in the first weeks. If your dog shows intense distress, hurts itself trying to escape, or isn't improving, talk to your veterinarian. They can rule out medical causes and may refer you to a certified positive-reinforcement trainer or veterinary behaviorist. This handout is general information, not veterinary advice.

Thank you for adopting. With patience and kindness, most dogs learn that you always come back.