

Problem Prevention

Preventing behavior issues is significantly easier (and cheaper!) than "fixing" them once they've become a habit. Think of these as "behavioral vaccines."

1. Separation Anxiety

The goal is to teach your puppy that your departure is a non-event and that being alone is actually a "snack-filled" opportunity.

- **Practice "Fake" Departures:** Put on your shoes and pick up your keys, then sit down and watch TV. Do this until the sound of your keys no longer makes your puppy's heart rate spike.
- **The "Home Alone" High-Value Treat:** Give a frozen KONG or a long-lasting chew **only** when you leave or move to another room.
- **Mini Absences:** Spend time in another room with a baby gate between you while you are home. This teaches them that "I can't get to you right now, but I'm safe and you're coming back."

See the handout below for more tips!

Setting Your New Dog or Puppy Up for **Successful ALONE Time**

Getting used to a new home and family is a big transition for any dog and it may take your furry friend some time to acclimate to a new environment. Part of this new routine will probably include you leaving your pup at home alone from time to time. Many dogs experience some degree of stress when left alone and it's not always easy to determine if this is the case when a dog first joins the family.

DOs	DO NOTs
<p>DO Start with short absences and build up gradually as long as your dog is not showing signs of stress.</p> 	<p>DO NOT Scold or punish your dog. They are not misbehaving or acting out of spite.</p> 
<p>DO Exercise with your dog and provide daily enrichment. Providing affection and attention does not cause separation anxiety.</p> 	<p>DO NOT Use Equipment that might be painful or scary. These will only mask symptoms of anxiety and can actually increase your dog's fear of being alone.</p> 
<p>DO Utilize an expert daycare or pet sitter until your dog is comfortable alone at home.</p> 	<p>DO NOT leave your dog in a crate if they haven't learned to relax while left alone in confinement.</p> 
<p>DO Contact your veterinarian and a professional trainer.</p> 	<p>DO NOT Leave your dog alone for any longer than they are comfortable. They will not just "get over it".</p> 

If your dog appears stressed when left alone and is not able to tolerate the short absences you are practicing, there are experts who can help! Contact your veterinarian and a professional dog trainer who is certified to work with separation anxiety cases for more information.

By Tina Flores. Illustrated by Lili Chin

2. Resource Guarding

This happens when a puppy fears you are going to take their "treasure" away. You want them to think your approach means *more* good stuff is coming.

- **The "Drop-By" Method:** While your puppy is eating or chewing a toy, walk past and drop a high-value treat (like chicken) near them, then keep walking. Don't touch them or the bowl.
- **Always "Trade Up":** Never just snatch an item away. If they have your shoe, offer a piece of steak or a better toy. They should feel like they "won" the exchange.

3. Jumping on Guests

Puppies jump because they want to get closer to your face (the "greeting zone").

- **Four on the Floor:** Only provide attention, petting, or treats when all four paws are on the ground.
- **Turn Your Back:** If they jump on you, immediately turn your back and become a "boring statue" until they put all their paws on the ground.
- **Be Consistent:** Make sure everyone in your household is being consistent with the "rules", including guests.

4. Destructive Behaviors

Most destruction is caused by boredom or teething.

- **Enforced Naps:** A tired puppy is a destructive puppy. Ensure they are getting 18–20 hours of sleep.
- **Mental Enrichment:** Use puzzle feeders, snuffle mats or lickmats (for wet food) instead of bowls. Working for food burns more brain-energy than a 30-minute walk.
- **Appropriate Outlets:** If they like to shred, give them a cardboard box (monitored). If they like to dig, give them a designated sandpit or "dig box."

5. Pulling On-Leash

Dogs naturally walk faster than us. You have to make walking near you more rewarding than "getting to that smell over there."

- **The "Sweet Spot" Rewards:** Carry high-value treats and reward them frequently right next to your pant leg while the leash is loose.
- **The "Red Light, Green Light" Method:** The moment the leash goes taut, stop moving immediately. Wait for your puppy to look back at you; as soon as they do, offer a treat and resume walking. This teaches them a simple cause-and-effect: **Tension = Stopping**, while **Slack = Rewards + Progress**.

6. On-Leash Reactivity

This is often caused by "frustrated greeters" (puppies who want to play but are held back by a leash).

- **Play the "Engage-Disengage" Game:** When your puppy sees another dog at a distance, give them a treat *before* they react. You want them to think: "Dog = Treat from my human," not "Dog = I need to bark and lunge to get over there."
- **Avoid On-Leash Greetings:** Do not let your puppy meet every dog they see on a walk. Leashes restrict their natural body language and can lead to tension. Focus on "neutrality"—being able to walk past another dog without a fuss.

A Note on "The Puppy Blues": It's normal to feel overwhelmed! If you're consistent now, you'll have a happy and confident adult dog later.

THE ENGAGE-DISENGAGE GAME

A training game for dogs who are FEARFUL, ANXIOUS, or FRUSTRATED around a specific trigger such as another dog, person, or sound. The goal is to first decrease the dog's fear/anxiety/frustration and then to teach the dog a new safe and appropriate behavior to do instead.

- PREP:**
- High value treats
 - Clicker (or verbal marker)
 - Humane harness or collar
 - Practice fast u-turns by luring your dog with a treat on his nose, or tossing "find-it" treats on the ground as you both walk away quickly in the opposite direction.
- Take a break if you see subtle stress signals (displacement behaviors) such as excessive lip licking, yawning, or scratching.



PLAY FOR 1-5 MINUTES. TAKE A BREAK. REPEAT.

LEVEL 1: ENGAGE

- 1 Start at a safe distance away from the trigger, where your dog is not reacting. Be quiet and still so your dog notices the trigger on his own.
- 2 **CLICK!**
At the precise moment your dog ENGAGES by looking at the trigger, CLICK!
- 3 When your dog turns his head towards you after the click, feed a treat.
If your dog reacts or is not turning back to you after the click, move further away from the trigger to reset at an easier distance.

LEVEL 1 GOAL:

To do at least 3-5 repetitions in a row at the same distance before moving on to LEVEL 2. A successful repetition is when your dog immediately turns back to you after the click.

If the trigger is moving or changing in intensity, keep playing LEVEL 1 until your dog has calmly looked at (or engaged with) the trigger from every direction. Then move on to LEVEL 2.

LEVEL 2: DISENGAGE

- 1 Let your dog notice the trigger again, but now wait 1-5 seconds to see if he will offer to LOOK AWAY from the trigger on his own.
If your dog is fixating on the trigger for longer than 5 seconds, GO BACK to LEVEL 1.
- 2 **CLICK!**
At the precise moment your dog DISENGAGES by looking away from the trigger, CLICK!
- 3 After the click, feed a treat.
If your dog reacts or is not turning back to you after the click, move further away from the trigger to reset at an easier distance.

LEVEL 2 GOAL:

To do at least 3-5 repetitions in a row before moving 1-5 steps closer to the trigger. A successful repetition is when your dog comfortably disengages with the trigger on his own.

As you move closer, keep playing LEVEL 2 if the trigger is not moving or changing in intensity. If the trigger is moving or changing in intensity, go back to LEVEL 1 at the new distance.



A reward-based puppy class will save you a lot of effort by teaching you exactly how to teach your puppy basic cues while providing your pup with essential dog-to-dog socialization in a safe, controlled environment. Check out... to see our group class schedule!