

BEING ALONE IS OK

Behavioral Vaccine 5

We all understand that puppies need to get vaccines for things such as parvo and rabies. But it is equally as important for puppies to get what is now being called “behavior vaccines.” These are the types of experiences that help your pup become comfortable in your world and they reduce the risk of fear and aggression later in life. Each week, we will talk about things you can do to “vaccinate” your puppy against problems later on.

Why Is It Important to teach your pup to be home alone?

It’s hard not to spend every waking minute with your adorable, cuddly new puppy. However, having your puppy be the center of your universe can set him up for anxiety in the future. Puppies that aren’t trained to slowly build tolerance to being alone don’t develop the “immunity” they need to be well adjusted. All of us have a life, and even if you work from home, you have to leave your dog unattended at times.

Being Alone Doesn't Come Naturally...

Puppies usually spend their first 8 weeks with their littermates. Up until that point, screaming, and barking serve as a strategy for their mom or littermates to find them should they end up by themselves. Since your puppy’s early experiences revolved around 24/7 companionship, it can be hard for him to adjust to a new home where he’s suddenly expected to go it alone.

Behavioral Vaccination Training

Some simple strategies for teaching your dog that it’s okay to be alone include:

- **Create a positive association with being crated.** The great thing about crate training is that it helps you potty train your puppy *and* teach him to relax when left alone. To begin creating a great association with the crate, make it a guaranteed source of good things. Feed your puppy his dinner in the crate, leave yummy stuffed Kongs in the crate, and offer the most comfortable bedding in the crate.
- **Practice confinement when you’re home (crate or x-pen).** Your job? Ignore (yes ignore!) your puppy for short periods of time. Then frequently reward him with a bit of food or a tasty chewie as long as he stays quiet. You can start as close to the crate as needed to set your dog up for success and then gradually create more distance between yourself and your pooch. For those using a crate, having your dog eat meals and stuffed Kongs in a crate while you’re home and relaxing near him can be invaluable settle-down practice.
- **Leave your dog with great things to chew. Be calm and cool when you leave.** If you have a screeching monkey of a pup, ignore and see if the dog quickly calms down. If not or if things are going from screeching monkey to screeching cheetah, talk to your trainer; we can help!