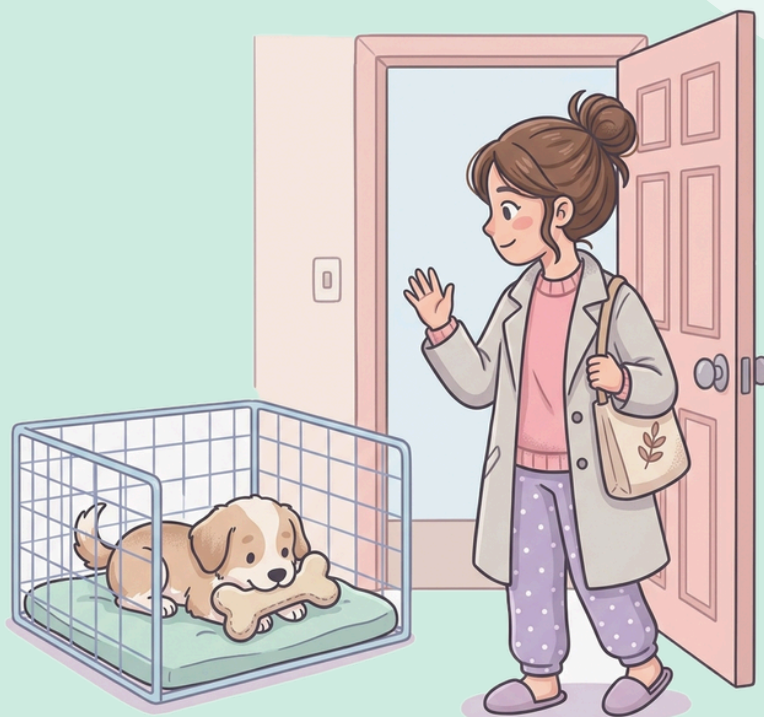


BONUS GUIDE

Home Alone Starter

A Gradual Plan to Help Your Puppy Feel Safe When You Leave



A companion to **Is This Normal? The Puppy Blues Survival Plan**

NIBBLE & NAP

INTRODUCTION

The Door Doesn't Have to Be Scary

You grab your keys and your puppy starts crying before you even reach the door. Or you come home to a soggy pen, a shredded towel and a puppy who acts like you've been gone for a year. If leaving the house feels impossible right now, you're in the right place.

Chapter 9 of the Survival Plan gave you the basics: start tiny, keep goodbyes boring, set up a safe space. This guide is the hands-on version. It turns those ideas into a week-by-week plan you can actually follow on a busy, tired, real-life schedule.

● What's inside

- **Chapter 1:** how to tell normal whining from real panic, so you know what you're dealing with.
- **Chapter 2:** how to set up an alone zone that helps your puppy relax.
- **Chapter 3:** the 4-week alone-time plan, with a session log and clear rules for when to move forward or step back.
- **Chapter 4:** departure and return routines, including how to make your keys and shoes boring.
- **Chapter 5:** real life. Work days, dog walkers, daycare, going back to the office, and a troubleshooting table.

● How to use this guide

Read Chapter 1 first. It tells you whether to start the plan as written or go slower. Then set up the zone (Chapter 2) before your first session.

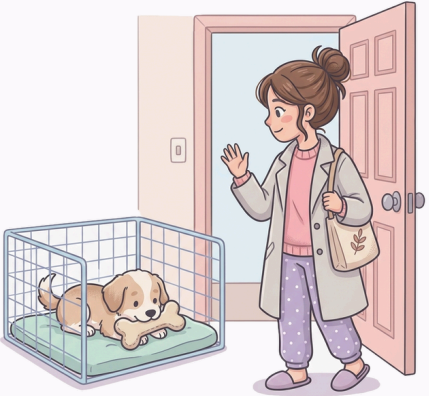
You don't need hours. Most sessions take five to ten minutes, a few times a day. The secret is not doing more. It's doing small things often, and stopping before your puppy gets upset.

Remember: every calm minute alone is a deposit in your puppy's confidence bank. Small deposits add up.

CHAPTER 1

Why Alone Time Is a Skill

Nobody is born knowing how to be alone. Your puppy spent every minute of their life with their mother and littermates, and now they have you. Learning that you leave and always come back is a skill, and skills are taught in small, easy steps.



Is this normal?

Yes, if your puppy whines, barks or paces for a short time after you leave, then settles with a chew or falls asleep. That's a puppy protesting, not panicking. It's not typical if your puppy cries non-stop for the whole absence, drools heavily, has accidents only when alone, or hurts themselves trying to get out. If you see that, pause the plan, call your vet, and look for a qualified reward-based trainer or veterinary behaviorist (more in Chapter 5).

● Protest vs panic: how to tell the difference

Both can be loud. What matters is what your puppy's body does and how the crying changes over time.

What you see	Usually protest	Possible panic
Crying	Starts, then fades within a few minutes	Keeps going or gets worse
Body	Loose, may lie down and chew	Panting, trembling, pacing nonstop
Food	Eats the chew or food toy	Ignores even favorite food
Damage	Random chewing, a toy or two	Scratching or chewing at doors, gates, crate bars
When you return	Happy, settles soon	Frantic, takes a long time to calm

A puppy who won't touch a favorite food toy when you leave is telling you something important. Fear switches appetite off. Treat "didn't eat it" as a sign to go slower, every time.

● Why some puppies find it harder

There's no single reason, and it's rarely about anything you did wrong. Some things that can make alone time harder:

- **Always together in the first weeks.** If you've been home 24/7, alone time is brand new.
- **A big change.** A move, a new schedule or someone in the family leaving the house more.
- **Being alone too long, too soon.** One bad experience can make the next one feel scarier.
- **Not enough sleep or exercise.** An overtired puppy copes with everything less well.
- **Temperament.** Some puppies are simply more sensitive. That's who they are, not a flaw.

● Film before you judge

You can't know what happens when you leave unless you see it. Before you start the plan, record a short absence:

- 1 Set up a phone or camera pointed at the alone zone.
- 2 Leave with your normal routine for just a few minutes.
- 3 Watch the video when you get back. Note what your puppy did, and when.

This "baseline" video is your starting point. It tells you whether your puppy starts settling within a few minutes (start at Week 1) or is already very upset in seconds (start with Week 1 at half the times, and read Chapter 5).

What to avoid

- ✗ **Guessing from the neighbors' complaints.** Film it so you know what really happens.
- ✗ **Calling it "spite."** Puppies don't take revenge. Messes and damage come from stress, boredom or a full bladder.
- ✗ **Ignoring a puppy who won't eat when alone.** It's one of the clearest signs you went too fast.
- ✗ **Comparing with your friend's puppy.** Every puppy starts at a different place.

 Your alone-skill checklist

- ☐ Read the protest vs panic table
- ☐ Recorded a baseline video of a short absence
- ☐ Noted when crying starts and when it stops
- ☐ Checked whether your puppy eats when alone
- ☐ Decided your starting point for the plan

CHAPTER 2

Setting Up the Alone Zone

Where your puppy stays alone matters almost as much as how long. A good alone zone feels safe, smells like home and has nothing dangerous in it. Set it up before your first training session, and use it for calm naps when you're home too.



Is this normal?

Yes, if your puppy prefers one setup over another. Some love a cozy crate, others feel trapped and do better in a pen or a small room. If your puppy pants, drools or bends crate bars trying to escape, stop using that setup for alone time and talk to your vet or a qualified professional. Escape attempts can cause injuries.

● Pen, crate or room: which one?

There's no single right answer. Pick the setup your puppy is already relaxed in.

Setup	Good for	Watch out for
Playpen	Most young puppies, space for bed and potty pad	Climbers and jumpers, wobbly panels
Crate	Puppies who already love their crate (Survival Plan, Chapter 5)	Only short absences, never if your puppy panics inside
Small room	Older puppies, calm chewers	Cables, baseboards, doors to scratch
Room plus gate	Puppies who like seeing the house	Gate must be tall and stable

Quick test: if your puppy chooses to nap in it with the door open, you've found a good spot.

● What goes inside

- **A comfortable bed** and, in a pen, a potty pad in the far corner for longer absences.
- **Water** in a bowl that can't tip over easily.
- **Two or three safe chews** your puppy already knows. Ask your vet which chews suit your puppy's size and age.
- **A food toy** used only for alone time (more on that in Chapter 4).
- **Something that smells like you**, such as an old t-shirt, if your puppy doesn't shred fabric.

Remove anything that could be swallowed in pieces. When you're not watching, safety beats variety.

● Location, sound and light

- **Away from the front door** if passing people or deliveries make your puppy bark.
- **Not in full sun** or next to a heater. Keep the room at a comfortable temperature, roughly what you'd like yourself.
- **Background noise:** soft music, talk radio or a white noise machine can cover outside sounds. Start it during calm times at home too, so it doesn't become the "you're leaving" signal.
- **Blinds partly closed** if your puppy reacts to dogs or people outside.

● Cameras: your best training tool

A simple pet camera or an old phone with a video call app lets you see exactly when your puppy starts to worry. That's how you know when to come back.

- **Watch live** during training sessions so you can return before stress builds.
- **Look at the first minutes** of every real absence. That's when problems usually show up.
- **Skip the talk-back speaker** for most puppies. Hearing your voice without seeing you can make some puppies more confused, not less.

What to avoid

- ✗ **Giving the whole house** for alone time too soon. More space often means more worry and more mischief.
- ✗ **Using the zone only when you leave.** Then the pen itself predicts loneliness.
- ✗ **Leaving toys that can break into pieces** or chews your vet hasn't okayed.
- ✗ **Tying your puppy up** to keep them in place. It's unsafe and stressful.
- ✗ **Forcing a panicking puppy** to stay in a crate. Switch to a pen or room and get help.

✓ Your alone-zone checklist

- ☐ Chose pen, crate or room based on where your puppy relaxes
- ☐ Bed, water, safe chews and potty pad if needed
- ☐ Dangerous items removed at puppy eye level
- ☐ Background noise tested during calm times
- ☐ Camera set up and checked
- ☐ Puppy naps in the zone when you're home too

CHAPTER 3

The 4-Week Alone-Time Plan

This is the heart of the guide. You'll go from seconds to short trips outside, one small step at a time. The four weeks are a guide, not a deadline: some puppies move faster, many need longer, and both are fine.



Is this normal?

Yes, if progress goes forward, then back a bit, then forward again. Bad days happen, especially after a busy weekend, a vet visit or a growth spurt. If your puppy gets worse over several weeks even at very short absences, stop and contact your vet and a qualified reward-based professional.

● **The three golden rules**

- 1 Stay under the worry line.** End each absence before your puppy starts crying. A quiet return teaches far more than a noisy one.
- 2 Mix it up.** Don't only go longer. Alternate short, medium and longer absences so leaving isn't always "harder than last time."
- 3 Short and often.** Three to five short sessions a day beat one long one. Practice when your puppy is already sleepy, after a potty break and some play.

● **The week-by-week plan**

Week	Goal	Example sessions	Move on when
1	Calm while you're nearby but busy	Puppy in zone with a chew, you in the room, then out of sight for 5-30 seconds	Your puppy keeps chewing when you step out
2	Calm with you in another room	Out of sight for 1-5 minutes, door closed for some reps	Relaxed or dozing for most of 5 minutes
3	Calm with the real exit	Front door, outside for 1-10 minutes: mailbox, trash, porch	Settles within a minute or two after the door closes
4	Calm for short outings	10-30 minutes: walk around the block, coffee pickup	Sleeps or chews quietly on camera

● A sample day in Week 2

Here's what a normal day of practice can look like, fitted around naps and meals.

Morning

- After breakfast, potty and a short play, put your puppy in the zone with a chew.
- Go to the kitchen for 1 minute. Come back calmly, say nothing special, carry on.
- Later, go to the bedroom for 3 minutes. Then the bathroom for 30 seconds.

Afternoon

- During the afternoon nap, step out of sight for 5 minutes while your puppy sleeps.
- Do one easy rep of 1 minute right after.

Evening

- One last short session, 2 minutes, then normal cuddles and bedtime routine.

Total training time: maybe 15 minutes across the whole day. That's it.

● Keep a simple session log

A notebook or a note on your phone is enough. For each session, write:

- **Time and length** of the absence
- **What you did** (another room, front door, outside)
- **What your puppy did** (chewed, slept, whined, cried)
- **How long before settling**, if they made noise

After a few days, patterns pop out. Maybe mornings are easy and evenings are hard. Maybe crying starts at exactly 4 minutes. Now you know where to work.

● When to go back a step

Go back to the last easy level and stay there a few days if:

- **Crying lasts more than a minute or two** after you leave.
- **Your puppy stops eating** the food toy.
- **You see panting, pacing or scratching** at the gate or door.
- **Your puppy is extra clingy** for the rest of the day.

Going back isn't failing. It's how the plan works. Build back up more slowly, with smaller jumps between levels.

What to avoid

- ✗ **Jumping from 5 minutes to an hour.** Big jumps are the most common reason plans stall.
- ✗ **Only training on weekends.** Short daily practice works better than one long weekend push.
- ✗ **Returning the second your puppy cries** at the very start. Wait for a breath of quiet, then come back. If crying keeps going, your next session should be much shorter.
- ✗ **Practicing when your puppy is wired.** Play, potty and calm down first.

✓ Your 4-week plan checklist

- ☐ Golden rules on the fridge
- ☐ Three to five short sessions a day
- ☐ Mixed short and longer absences
- ☐ Session log started
- ☐ Clear "go back a step" signs known by everyone
- ☐ Camera used in every session from Week 2

CHAPTER 4

Departure and Return Routines

Puppies are brilliant at spotting patterns. Shoes, keys, coat, the bag: by the time you reach the door, your puppy may already be worried. This chapter teaches those signals to mean nothing at all, and makes your goodbyes and hellos calm and predictable.



Is this normal?

Yes, if your puppy follows you around when you get ready or perks up at the jingle of keys. They're paying attention. It's a bigger concern if your puppy starts trembling, panting or hiding as soon as you pick up your keys, before you've even left. In that case, work on this chapter first, go slow, and consider asking a qualified professional for help.

• Make your keys boring

The goal is to show your puppy that departure cues often lead to nothing. Do this several times a day, while your puppy is relaxed, separate from your alone-time sessions:

- 1 **Pick up your keys**, then put them down. Go back to what you were doing.
- 2 **Put on your shoes**, walk to the kitchen, make tea.
- 3 **Wear your coat** while you watch TV for five minutes.
- 4 **Pick up your bag**, walk to the door, put the bag down.
- 5 **Open and close the front door** without going out.

Watch your puppy's reaction. When they barely lift their head, that cue is "done." Most of the work happens in a few minutes here and there, spread over days.

• The departure routine

Use the same short routine every time you actually leave, so your puppy knows what to expect:

- 1 **Potty break** and a little play or sniffing about 15-20 minutes before you go.
- 2 **Quiet time**: puppy in the zone, maybe a short nap.
- 3 **Food toy in**, just as you're about to leave.

- 4 **Calm cue:** one relaxed phrase like "be right back" in a normal voice.
- 5 **Leave** while your puppy is busy with the food toy.

● Food toys that do the work

A food toy given only when you leave turns your departure into the start of something good. It also keeps your puppy busy during the first minutes, which are often the hardest.

- **Start easy.** Loose kibble in a rubber toy your puppy can empty quickly. Success first.
- **Then make it last longer.** Mix kibble with a little wet food, or part of the puppy's meal soaked in water.
- **Freeze some** for longer absences. Prepare three or four at once on Sunday so they're ready.
- **Lick mats** work well for puppies who get frustrated with toys.
- **Use part of the daily food**, not extra. Ask your vet about portions and anything new you want to add.

Pick it up when you return, so it stays special.

● The return routine

Your return matters as much as your departure. A big, excited hello makes your absence feel like a bigger deal.

- 1 **Walk in calmly.** A soft "hi" is fine.
- 2 **Do something boring** for a minute: put down your bag, wash your hands.
- 3 **Wait for a moment of calm**, like four paws on the floor or a sit.
- 4 **Then say hello** quietly, with gentle petting.
- 5 **Potty break** right away.

If you find a mess, clean it with an enzyme cleaner without comment. Check your camera footage later to see what happened and adjust the plan.

What to avoid

- ✗ **Long, emotional goodbyes.** They tell your puppy something big is about to happen.
- ✗ **Sneaking out** while your puppy is distracted, every time. Some puppies become hypervigilant and stop settling.
- ✗ **Leaving the food toy around** all day. It loses its power.
- ✗ **Scolding for a mess** when you get back. Your puppy can't connect it to earlier and will only feel more worried when you return.

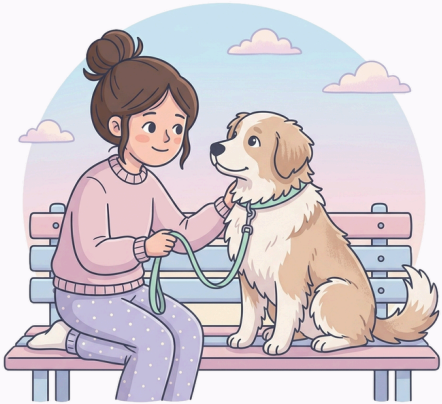
✓ Your departure checklist

- ☐ Keys, shoes and coat practiced as "non-events" daily
- ☐ Same short departure routine every time
- ☐ Food toys prepared in advance
- ☐ Food toy only for alone time
- ☐ Calm, boring return routine
- ☐ Enzyme cleaner within reach

CHAPTER 5

Real Life

Training plans are lovely. Then Monday arrives, your boss wants you in the office and the dog walker cancels. This chapter is about making alone time work with a real schedule, solving common problems, and knowing when it's more than whining.



Is this normal?

Yes, if your puppy has an off day after a schedule change, a busy weekend or a vet visit. Go back a step for a day or two. It's not normal if your puppy shows panic every time you leave, even for a minute: nonstop howling, heavy drooling, accidents only when alone, or injuries from trying to escape. That needs your vet and a qualified reward-based professional, not more practice.

● Work days: build a plan before you need it

Young puppies can't stay alone for a full workday. How long your puppy can hold their bladder depends on age, size and health, so ask your vet what's realistic. Then plan the gaps.

Your schedule	A possible plan
Work from home	Puppy naps in the zone while you work in another room. Practice real exits at lunch.
Half days out	Short absence plus a midday visit from a family member or walker
Full days out	Midday walker or sitter, maybe two visits for a young puppy, or daycare some days
Long shifts	Ask family or a sitter to stay part of the day while alone time is still short

Tip: even if you work from home, leave the house for real a few times a week. A puppy who has never been alone in an empty house can find the first real absence very strange.

● Dog walkers and sitters

A midday visit breaks the day into shorter chunks your puppy can handle.

- **Introduce them first**, with you at home. A walk together, a few treats from their hand.
- **Share your routines**: potty spot, food toy, calm return, the alone zone.
- **Ask for a short message** after each visit: potty, play, how your puppy seemed.
- **Choose reward-based people only**. Ask how they handle jumping or nipping. No yelling, no leash jerks.

● Daycare: helpful for some, not for all

Daycare can be a great option for social, confident puppies on long days. It doesn't replace learning to be alone at home, though.

- **Ask your vet** if your puppy is ready, especially about vaccines.
- **Visit first**. Look for small groups by size and age, enough staff, and rest times.
- **Watch your puppy afterward**. Tired and happy is great. Exhausted, cranky or scared means it may be too much.
- **Keep practicing at home** on non-daycare days, so alone time doesn't disappear.

● Back to the office: the transition plan

If you've been home with your puppy for weeks and are going back to the office, start preparing early. A few weeks ahead is ideal.

- 1 Start the 4-week plan now**, before the first office day.
- 2 Shift your routine** to the new wake-up and walk times.
- 3 Do a few practice days**: leave as if you were going to work, with the walker coming at the planned time.
- 4 Start with shorter days**, a half day or a hybrid week if your job allows it.
- 5 Check the camera** in the first days to see how your puppy is coping.

● If... / Try...

If...	Try...
Your puppy cries as soon as you pick up your keys	More "boring keys" practice (Chapter 4) before alone sessions
They ignore the food toy when you leave	Make it easier and tastier, and shorten the absence
They're fine for 5 minutes, then cry	Stay at 3-4 minutes for a few days, mix in very short reps
They're fine with you upstairs, not when you go out	Add front door steps: open, step out, come back in seconds
They bark at sounds outside	Move the zone away from the door, add background noise
They chew the pen or bed	Check boredom and tiredness first, offer more chews, shorter absences
Accidents happen only when alone	Potty right before leaving, shorter absences, and ask your vet
It was going well, now it's worse	Go back to the last easy level for a few days. Check for changes in routine or health
A family member always comes back when the puppy cries	Agree on the same rules for everyone, written on the fridge

● When it's more than whining

Some puppies don't just protest. They panic. It's not your fault, and it's not something to "push through."

Contact your vet first if you see:

- **Nonstop howling or barking** for most of the absence
- **Heavy drooling, panting or trembling** when alone
- **Accidents only when alone**, in a puppy who is otherwise doing well
- **Destruction at doors, windows or crate bars**
- **Injuries** like broken nails, bleeding gums or chipped teeth from trying to escape
- **Refusing food** every time you leave

Your vet can check for health problems and discuss the options available for your puppy, including whether extra support might help alongside training. Ask about a qualified reward-based trainer or a

veterinary behaviorist too.

While you wait for help, avoid leaving your puppy alone for longer than they can handle. Use family, friends, a sitter or daycare to cover the gaps. Every panicky absence can make the next one harder, so prevention is part of the treatment.

What to avoid

- ✗ **"Just let them cry it out"** when crying is nonstop. A panicking puppy doesn't learn to relax, only to fear the door.
- ✗ **Bark collars, spray collars or any punishment** for crying. They add fear to fear.
- ✗ **Getting a second dog** to fix the problem. Many puppies are anxious about your absence, not about being without any dog.
- ✗ **Waiting months** to ask for help if things keep getting worse.

✓ Your real-life checklist

- ☐ Asked your vet how long your puppy can realistically hold their bladder
- ☐ Midday plan for work days (walker, sitter, family or daycare)
- ☐ Walker or sitter introduced and briefed on routines
- ☐ Back-to-office practice days scheduled
- ☐ Troubleshooting table shared with the family
- ☐ Panic signs known, vet number at hand

THE END

Before You Go

Learning to be alone is one of the quietest wins in puppyhood. There's no cute trick to show off, and nobody sees it.

But one day you'll grab your keys, and your puppy will glance up from their bed and go back to sleep. That's the moment.

It may take a few weeks, or a few months, and some days will go backward. Keep sessions short, keep goodbyes boring, and trust the small steps.

For the bigger picture, go back to the Survival Plan, especially Chapter 9 and Chapter 17. And if your nights are still rough or accidents keep happening when you're out, *Sleep Rescue* and *Potty Rescue* pick up right where this guide leaves off.

This guide is a training and lifestyle resource for puppy owners. It is not veterinary or medical advice. Always follow your veterinarian for anything related to your dog's health. For aggression, strong fears or panic, consult a qualified professional.

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