# **Leaving Your K9 Buddy Alone**

Dogs naturally enjoy our company. All GDB dogs in particular have been raised and nurtured to be with people. When you spend time bonding with your dog, you are also patterning good house behavior. Since your K9 Buddy is not a service dog and does not have access to places pet dogs cannot go, you will inevitably need to leave your dog at home for short periods of time. How can you teach your dog that they will be fine in your absence? What can you do to maintain the good house behaviors you’ve worked so hard to establish?

Not surprisingly, a sudden change from constant company to none can create anxiety in some dogs. Other dogs may get bored when left alone. A bored or anxious dog can develop annoying or destructive behaviors like barking, chewing or digging. In order to care for your dog’s emotional well-being as well as prevent undesirable behavior, it is important to prepare your dog.

This material will teach you how to introduce solo time to your dog. Once a dog understands that their person will actually return, they become a self-assured dog that is comfortable on their own. If you are confident that your dog can enjoy some relaxing time by themself, then you too can be more at ease.

**General Note about Hellos and Goodbyes**

Whenever you leave or return to your dog, it is important to be low-key in your demeanor and matter-of-fact in your handling. Showing excessive emotion or appearing tentative during these times can create anxiety in your dog. As with any handling we do with our dogs, if you are confident, your dog will follow suit.

**Where to Leave Your Dog**

Young dogs have active minds and bodies. Initially, keeping your dog on tie down or in a crate when you are gone ensures your dog’s safety and maintains good behavior. We discuss these methods further in the material titled, “Transitioning from Our Campus to Your Home”.

When we talk about leaving your dog alone, we mean leaving your dog in a safe environment. Tying your dog outside a building or leaving your dog in a parked, closed car is potentially dangerous to your dog and not recommended at any time.

**Introducing Alone Time**

It is important that you practice with your dog on a regular basis before you actually leave your dog unsupervised. Having your dog on tie down while you are in the next room (bathroom, for instance) is a good way to start teaching alone time for your dog. When you first start, keep the sessions short. Building on success, you can gradually increase the amount of time your dog is left alone.

# **Steps to follow**

1. Calmly place your dog either on tie down or in a crate. When using a tie down, a collar with a "quick-release" snap attachment feature is the safest and recommended option, in case the dog were to get momentarily tangled. When leaving your dog alone either on tie down or in a crate, be sure to remember to remove additional collars such as the head collar.
2. Leave your radio or TV on at a low volume tuned to a station you normally listen to; this “white noise” creates a sense of normalcy for your dog and blocks out any sounds from the outside that may trigger your dog to react.
3. Give a low-key informal verbal cue (“you stay” or “wait there” or “be good”) as you leave the room. Let them choose whatever settling posture they want as long as they behave. For some dogs, it may help them relax if they are cued into a down position.
4. Appear to *really* be leaving; gather your backpack, purse, jacket, keys, phone or whatever you normally bring with you when you leave your home.
5. Close your door, walk away loudly. Then tip toe back and listen.
6. If your dog begins to bark or whine, immediately open the door and say "no, quiet!" in a firm tone. No need to yell.
7. Leave again and close the door behind you. Repeat this as many times as necessary until your dog stays quietly, even if it is only for a few minutes.
8. After 5 or 10 minutes of quiet, open the door, peek in and calmly praise your dog. Depending on your dog, you can either successfully end the session now or continue the exercise.

Repeat this exercise at different times of the day, and gradually increase the time you leave your dog alone. Each time you return to a quiet dog, praise them calmly and affectionately. An occasional food reward will reinforce how happy you are with their silence and good behavior. Sometimes take your dog off tie down; other times praise and reward them and leave again, even if just for a minute or two. This variable handling teaches your dog to be patient and to realize that being alone is no big deal—my person always returns.

With practice, your dog will learn that you only leave temporarily and may return at any moment. When they stay quietly, you come back and praise them. If they get noisy, it immediately brings a verbal correction. These practice sessions make your dog believe that you are always nearby, even if they can't see you.

When teaching your dog to stay alone, you have the option to give your dog a safe toy that may also help settle your dog into the behavior you want and can serve as a distraction during the departure transition. A standard-issue Nylabone™ is a common choice. You will want to consider your individual dog and their needs when making these decisions.

**One Lesson Is Not Enough**

Practicing this with your dog can be tedious for you, but the time and effort put into your young dog will pay off with peace of mind when you are separated. If your dog is accustomed to being left alone for 20-30 minutes every day, they will be better prepared when the need comes for you to leave them for longer periods of time.

**How Long is Reasonable?**

The time you leave a dog unattended will depend on your individual dog and the circumstances. Generally, during the day, periods of time up to 4 hours are acceptable. At night during bedtime, most dogs will do just fine for periods of 8-10 hours on tie down or in a crate as this is normally a quiet time for everyone.

**Conclusion**

If you only plan to leave your dog alone occasionally, it is still important to prepare them. A dog that has practiced being alone and knows what to expect is confident and less likely to develop undesirable behaviors. When you are away, you can rest assured knowing that your dog is comfortable and relaxed in your absence.