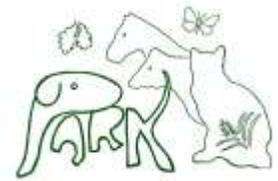


Park Veterinary Centre



COPING WITH SEPARATION

Dogs are highly social animals and normally live in groups so they are not used to spending long periods of time alone. They prefer the company of other members of their pack and when you acquire a dog, you and your family will become his pack. Puppies particularly, should not be left alone for long periods of time on a regular basis, but it is important that they learn to accept short separations from an early age e.g. while you are out shopping.

Some dogs get so much attention from their owners that they cannot bear them to be out of their sight. When left alone, these dogs suffer severe distress. You can help your puppy accept being left for short periods by observing a few simple rules.

- Introduce a chew toy that rewards your puppy. Examples of these are Kongs, Buster cubes and biscuit balls. While the puppy is chewing the toy, small amounts of food will intermittently drop out of it. Your puppy then has two reasons to chew the toy. He likes chewing and he gets a reward when he does. It's also more interesting than your sofa or kitchen cabinet. Fill your chosen toy with a variety of food treats. Examples are dry puppy food, ham, chicken, biscuits, cheese and carrots. He will then get a different reward every time.
- Accustom your puppy to staying in one part of the house while you are in another. Do this for very short periods initially e.g. 1-2 minutes. Build up the length of time gradually. Keep the special chew toy specifically for this purpose. Fill it up with food and give it to him as you leave him.
- Whenever you leave your puppy, try to be very 'matter of fact' about it. Don't talk to him lovingly and stroke him for a long time. Don't spend a long period explaining how you don't want to leave him, that you'll be back soon and he is not to worry. All this attention WILL worry him. It will

- highlight your absence because you were giving him so much attention before. Just put the toy down, say “see you later” and GO!
- When you return, don’t overdo your greeting. This also highlights how wonderful it is to have you back and how awful it’s been without you. Keep it simple and jolly.
- If your puppy has done something you don’t approve of while you have been away. DO NOT PUNISH HIM! He will not relate the punishment to the deed but he will relate it to your appearance and his approach towards you. This will make him more anxious about you coming back and may cause him to be destructive in your absence because of that anxiety.