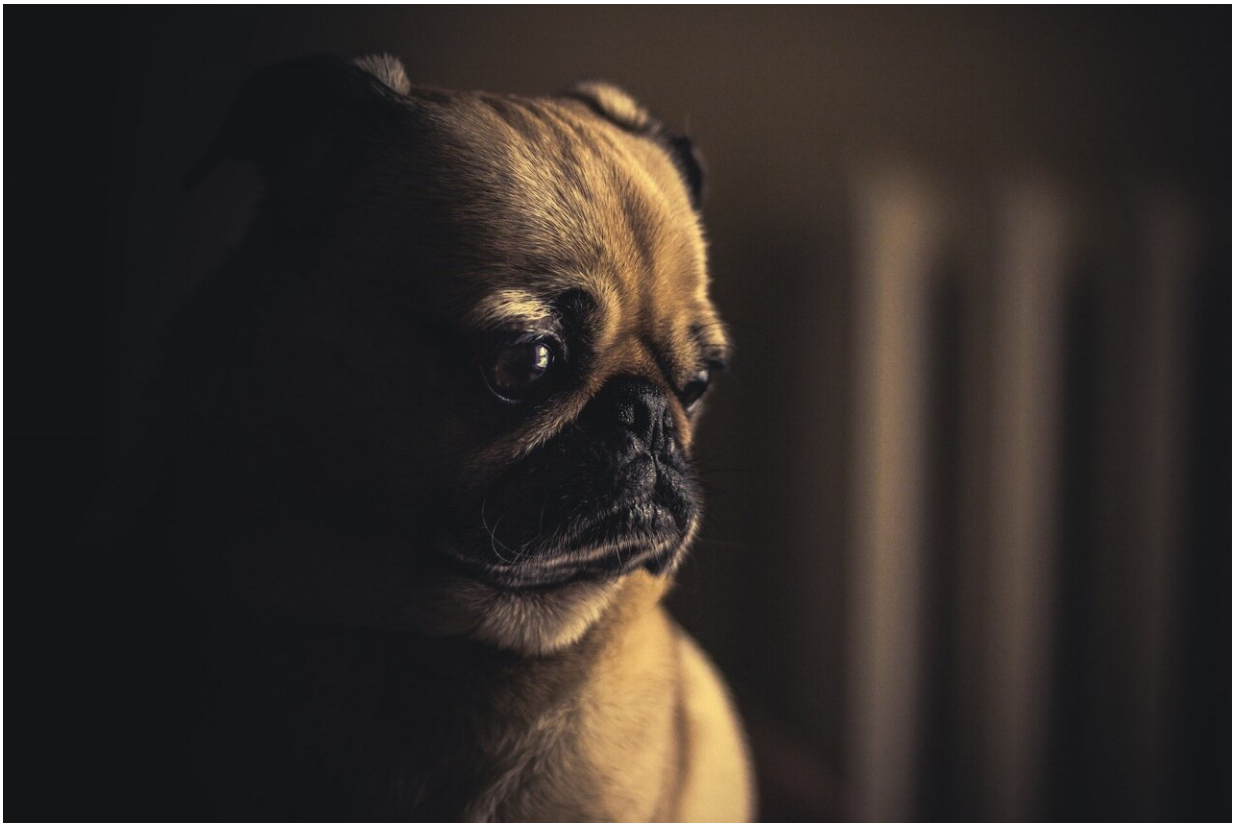


# How to help your pandemic puppy avoid doggy distress

June 8 2021, by Alicita Rodriguez

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Many people are living on pandemic time. Before COVID and after COVID, in other words. And the post-pandemic world is rapidly changing as more people get vaccinated. Students are going back to

school, parents are going back to work—and pandemic puppies are feeling the loss. For anyone who welcomed a canine companion during stay-at-home life, here are some pointers (pun intended) for reducing doggy distress.

## **Decondition Leaving Behaviors**

Before you return to work or school, decondition your dog by practicing your typical leaving behaviors. Get dressed to go out, grab your keys, and leave home "at the time you would normally leave for work," the American Kennel Club (AKC) advises.

You can put on your shoes multiple times a day—and then don't go anywhere. Grab your keys and jingle them or put them in your pocket. You can also treat your dog after the dog calms down following a leaving behavior. For example, grab your keys. If your nervous dog pants when he hears the keys, don't reward him with a treat until he stops panting and lies down in a relaxed state.

## **Transition Slowly**

If life is changing, change it slowly. Luckily, CU Denver's aptly titled "Soft Return" period should help as you transition your dogs to a more independent life. Staff began their Soft Return the first week of June, with many Lynx employees coming back to work in person 1—2 days a week. In July, staff will increase to 2—3 days a week of in-person work. The idea, as the Lynx Together Task Force put it, is to "allow employees to slowly transition into new routines."

Not surprisingly, a slow transition is also good for dogs. The AKC suggests, "Ease back into your routine." For dogs who've never been alone—those who came home during the pandemic to people who were

staying home most of the time—the slow transition may have to be much slower. VCA Hospital website offers this advice: "Start with just a moment or two, then gradually work up to longer and longer separations." As an example, try increasing separation in three-minute intervals. Day 1: Family leaves dog alone for three minutes. Day 2: Family leaves dog alone for six minutes. And so on.

## **A Tired Dog Is a Good Dog**

Veterinarians also recommend giving your dog a good amount of exercise before you leave the house. The amount of exercise varies depending on the dog's age and physical condition. A 20-minute walk or 15-minute play session is a good place to start. "This exercise will help your dog burn off [excess energy](#) and help them stay relaxed and calm throughout the day," the AKC website states.

For puppies, younger dogs, and high-energy canines, arrange for a neighbor, friend, or professional dog walker to come by during the day while you're gone to give your dog additional exercise. Some students and workers may be able to return home during lunch or break to give the dog another walk or play period. In the summer, some dog owners may be able to hire responsible older kids who are out of school to provide dog walks for a reasonable fee.

## **Interactive Toys**

People can also give their dogs something to do while they're gone. A recent article in [The Guardian](#) states, "Too many dogs are left to languish away on their own all day with nothing to do." There are many interactive toys such as food puzzles and treat dispensers you can leave for your dog when you're gone. Make sure to rotate the interactive toys so dogs don't get bored of their entertainment!

There are also free and low-cost ways to provide canine fun. A dog lover in University Communications collects stray tennis balls from a nearby court, cuts a slit in them, fills them with yogurt/peanut butter and crushed treats, and freezes them. Before he leaves for work, he gives one of the frozen tennis balls to each dog. Hide and seek is another low-cost game. Simply hide treats in hard-to-reach places before you leave home (under the couch, inside a shoe, in a slightly open drawer).

## **For the Truly Anxious**

Dogs with extreme separation anxiety may pant, salivate, pace, or destroy things. If you want to know how anxious your dog truly is when you leave, you might consider using a video baby monitor or security camera to see how your dog behaves while you're away. If the dog is very stressed in your absence, you could try calming pheromone sprays, CBD oil, or weighted coats like Thundershirt.

Some dogs might require medicine to treat their separation anxiety. If they are experiencing high stress, consult with your veterinarian. Some [dogs](#) can benefit from anti-anxiety and/or anti-depressant medication when times are ruff!

Provided by University of Colorado Denver

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