

Isolated Dogs: Problems and Solutions

Why do problems result from dogs being left alone for long periods of time?

Dogs are social pack animals; the dog considers you and your family members as part of his “pack”. If the dog is left alone in the yard all day and then sleeps in the garage all night, with only an occasional hour or two spent in the house with the family, his boredom and loneliness could lead to many dog behavior problems.

What are some of the behavior problems that could result from isolation?

- **Barking:** Dogs who are bored and lonely often engage in excessive barking. This could be because he is left alone for long periods without social interaction, his environment does not include toys or bones, he is a puppy and has no other outlets for his energy, or he is a herding or sporting breed who needs a “job” to be happy.
- **Digging:** Bored, lonely dogs often resort to digging as an outlet for their frustration.
- **Escaping:** Dogs may succeed in escaping from the yard in search of a place that is neither lonely nor boring. Dangers resulting from dogs that are running loose can be expensive for the owner, and can cause injury or be fatal for the dog or an innocent bystander.
- **Destructive Behavior:** Bored, lonely dogs may turn to chewing on anything in reach to entertain themselves, such as patio furniture, house siding, garden hoses, or even their own feet, flanks, or body parts. Self-mutilation could lead to many other health problems.

What is the solution to these problems of isolation?

The simple prevention for boredom and loneliness for most pet dogs is to **make them a member of the family**. Of course there are times you will need to leave the dog alone at home. But when you are home, expand your dog’s world, and increase his “people time” so when he is left alone, he has had some satisfying interaction with you, and knows he will have more when you return.

- When you are home, have the dog inside the house with you.
- Let him sleep inside the house.
- Include him in family activities.
- Enroll him in an obedience class and practice commands with him each day for mental stimulation and reinforcement of acceptable, desired behaviors.
- Mental and physical exercise each day is highly recommended: walk your dog, teach him to fetch a ball or Frisbee, and provide interesting toys to keep your dog busy when you’re not home.