

Puppy Home Alone: Are You Creating Chaos or Calm?

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG You know it's completely normal to feel some apprehension about leaving your puppy alone, but you need to recognize there are things that you do that contribute to the chaos or calm that you're going to find when you return home. Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. And today, I'm going to share with you the formula that I use for a happy life with a puppy. The formula that I use to help decrease the possibility of any separation anxiety.

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I'm going to share with you the three keys that I think are critical you do before you leave the house. The puppy morning schedule that I use when I have a puppy. My morning routine does change a little bit when I have a puppy. And I'm also going to share what I think are five huge mistakes that people make that contribute to a puppy having some serious meltdowns when they're left alone.

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Some dogs have got to the point where they have serious separation anxiety. They may do things like drool when they're in confinement or left alone. They may get destructive. They bark and claw and scratch. Some dogs will urinate or defecate. They are just so upset about being left alone.

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Now that could be a created problem but nonetheless, I strongly recommend you seek out the advice of a Veterinary Behaviorist to help you overcome this. The protocol I'm about to share with you will go a long way to help that but don't be afraid to call a Veterinary Behaviorist to accelerate the process for you and your dog. Let's jump right in and talk about the big elephant in the separation anxiety room.

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And that is the role of confinement and how it is possible to have a puppy look forward to being in confinement. Now you might be scratching your head and saying, "No, that's not possible." So often, when I talk about [crate training a puppy](#), people say, "That's cruel. I would never do that to a puppy." But let me walk you through the scenario; let's say you book a room at a hotel, you're traveling alone, and you go to the front desk, they give you your keys, and they take you to the ballroom.

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Now the ballroom of a very nice hotel is huge. Now they have a nice little bed set up in the middle of the ballroom for you, and they have all the things that you would have in your hotel room that are scattered around that room. But it's a massive, big room. Who would like to stay in a ballroom? "No. No, thank you. Do you have something a little smaller, like a regular hotel room?"

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So, when you think you're being kind to your puppy because you lock them in your laundry room and you give them all this room, and they can have all these options of things they can do, you are anthropomorphizing that your puppy would like all of this room.



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When the truth is, if you spend some time conditioning the puppy to a smaller area, you will have a puppy who settles so much faster when you leave them alone. So, we agree that some level of confinement has to happen. Right. Okay. We're going to come back to this one, but first, let's talk about the calm arrivals and departures.

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People always tell you, "If you want to avoid separation anxiety, you've got to make sure you don't make a big deal about when you come home or when you leave.", but they never tell you why. And the why has to do with when you pick up a set of car keys, and your dog loves a car ride. And the why is the same reason as when you pick up a set of keys and dogs who love a car ride go cray cray.

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Because the dog anticipates that they're going to go in the car when you pick up a set of car keys, and they start spinning and barking, and "this is exciting!" and "this is my favorite thing on earth!". Dogs are brilliant at picking up patterns of reinforcement. Therefore, they're brilliant at anticipating things they really want to have happen.

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And so, when you come home every night, and you greet your dogs with, "Oh, I miss you so much! What did you do? Did you have a good day? Oh, I love you! I love you! I love you!" Your dogs or puppy are going to start anticipating, "Oh, it's about five o'clock. This is when she comes in," and they're going to get really excited. And then when you come through the door, they're probably going to start singing the songs of their people and barking and spinning and crazy going crazy.

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If you want your dog to be chill when you're gone, you've got to withhold your need to want to have this massive party when you come walking through the door. Calm arrivals and calm departures are so critical in having a puppy adjust to being left alone. So, I'll share with you what that looks like in my routine.

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So, [my puppy routine](#). My early morning routine with a puppy. I wake up; the puppy is always in a crate beside my bed. And I take them out of the crate without saying anything to them, hooked the leash over their collar, take them outside for a pee. Once they've had their pee, then I praise them and talk to them, and we go back in the house, and I put them in an ex-pen.

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Now the ex-pen is probably in the kitchen where I'm going to spend the next little bit of time. So, the puppy has been in a crate all night. They get to stretch their legs, and there's going to be some toys in there. I will be supervising the puppy in that ex-pen until the puppy reaches a stage when I can trust that they're not going to make any mistakes. They're not going to urinate or defecate in that ex-pen.

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And at that point, then I can leave the room and maybe go and have a shower as long as there's nothing that could be dangerous in the ex-pen with the puppy, like a toy that they could maybe chew a button off of and swallow it or get into trouble, something like that.



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So, I wake up, take the puppy out for pee break, make sure that they don't have to do anything else, put them in their ex-pen so that they can play, and I will go about my morning routine. The three key events that I would encourage you to include in your morning routine look like this. **Train, walk, and something that I call enterichment.**

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And so, an hour before I'm going to go off to work, I'm going to get my puppy out, and I'm going to do some training with them. It's usually about 15 minutes. If we're training inside, I'll take them outside for a little potty break, and then I bring them back in the house, and they go in a crate where I give them their breakfast or at least the portion of the breakfast that's leftover after I've trained them.

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And then I'm going to go about the puppies in their crate. They're eating, and I'll go about whatever I have to do until they're finished eating. And now that's probably 45 minutes before I'm going to leave. I take the puppy out. We go for a walk, age-appropriate time, maybe five minutes, maybe 10 minutes, maybe 20 minutes.

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After I bring the puppy back from their walk, they're going to want to have their little puppy zoomies. And so, I'll either have them in the living room or the kitchen or wherever I can keep an eye on them. And if I can't keep an eye on them, then they can go back into that ex-pen. But I really like to let them stretch their legs around the house.

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Now, 10 minutes before I leave, and this is an important one. We have stage one of the enterichment. Now, this is enrichment combined with entertainment. I put them back in their crate, and I'll give them one of several things. It could be a topl stuffed with food.

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Now, if this is a young puppy that I'm leaving, I don't like to put too much food in there because they're going to have to go to the bathroom after. So maybe it's just a little bit of wet food that's coated around the outside of the topl. The other thing I might do is do the metal bowl with a meatball trick.

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So, there'll be two metal bowls. One of them has got a meatball under it, and I'll just move that around and leave the puppy to figure out which one it is and how to get the metal bowl flipped out so they can get that meatball. Or the other thing I might do is something called Easter biscuits where I'll just scatter a few cookies under a blanket and then let the puppy know about and trying to find those cookies.

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Again, I don't do a lot of that, not a lot of cookies, because I might be leaving the puppy for an hour, two hours, three hours. Another thing that you can do is leave them with a bone. I'm not a big fan of that because I'm afraid that they could choke or get the bone hooked around their lower jaw or something happens, so I don't often leave my dogs unsupervised with a bone.



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The goal is to have a routine that the puppy knows 10 minutes before you go out, they get one little form of enrichment, for 10 minutes they're alone. But you're still in the house; you're milling about, you're ignoring them. Now 10 minutes later, I'm ready to leave.

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I put a second enrichment toy in there. Take out the first one, even if there's something in there. And then I close the crate door. I'll say, "Have a good day." And that's it. I might walk around another room, so they hear me walking around the house for maybe another 60 seconds, and then I go out the door, and that's it.

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Now, if you've got a young puppy, that time alone shouldn't be more than two or three hours. Maybe have a neighbor come in, or a dog walker, pet sitter that can come in and just let that puppy come out and relieve themselves. A young puppy, I don't like to leave them more than a few hours alone before they get outside.

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So routine is critically important, and those three critical things that happen. An hour before a little bit of training, 45 minutes before they get their breakfast, 10 minutes before they get their first bout of enrichment, and as just before I leave, they get their second little bout of enrichment.

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So that's the routine, but you've got to build up to that. You can't just say, "Okay, puppy, I'm leaving. You got to suck it up because I got to put you in a crate." You are going to build up to that, and it might look something like this. Go to my YouTube video called ['perch work, pivots, and spins.'](#) There I show you how to condition a dog to want to put their feet on a big blanket.

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So, start with an old blanket, and you're going to eventually get your puppy that loves putting their feet on the blanket. That could be the blanket you leave in their crate when you go away. Now you could start playing games like 'Let's play the blankets in the crate,' and we're going to throw some Easter biscuits, which is just scattering some cookies under the blanket.

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Close the door. When they're finished, you're going to let them out. Or close the door, and you're going to walk around their crate and then let them out. And they're going to want to go back in there because they're not finished sniffing for all the cookies. Let them go back in there, walk in a bigger circle around their crate.

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We want to gradually get the puppy used to you don't have to be together. Even if you're in the same house, the puppy doesn't have to be by your side all the time. Okay. It's so important. This is a gift you are giving to your puppy. You are giving them the gift of being confident when they are alone. You're going to gradually build this up to you can be in the other room, and maybe you might even go out of the room for five minutes.



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The problem is people kind of shove a puppy in a crate, and then they leave them. And they get barking and whining. Enter the dogs that end up being chaotic when they're left alone. Feeding your puppy their meals in their crate anytime you want to give them a treat.

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Just have them get in their crate. Give them the treat, and then get them right out of the crate. The more you can have your puppy go in their crate and get out, go in the ex-pen, and then come out, they're going to be more relaxed about the times you ask them to go in. And finally, absolutely, I have a game online called [Crate Games](#). And it is the best way for you to have a strategic approach to making that crate being a place of comfort for your puppy.

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Invest the time in playing Crate Games with your puppy. And then you have a puppy who doesn't mind being confined at all. But don't just let confinement be either when I'm sleeping at night or when I leave. It's got to be times in while you are in the house that they get used to being home alone with you still there. And that's a rehearsal for being home alone when you go out.

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Now the five big mistakes that people make that contribute to having a puppy going cray cray when you leave them alone. Number one, refusing to use a crate because you think it's cruel. Refusing to have that puppy be confined in any way because you want them to just be a dog. Because the truth is you are teaching the dog, 'you and I were going to be together all the time.' And let's face it, there are times when that's just not going to happen.

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Even if you're raising a service dog, there's going to be times when that puppy or dog is going to be at the Veterinary clinic. They have to be a confident dog to be at their best for you. You don't want them to be anxious. You want them to be confident, and the way that they grow to be confident is by learning to be confined and not be worried about it.

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The second mistake that people make creates chaos when they leave. And that is the use of negative reinforcement. Now stick with me because that sounds like it's bad. And it actually isn't. Reinforcement means the animal likes it. Negative means you're taking something away, and the animal likes it.

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Here's what happens. People don't do what I suggest and build up the dog's confinement time in a crate, and so when they put the dog in the crate, they start whining or barking. And it breaks your heart a little bit. And so, you go in the other room and kind of let them bark and whine, and then you go, "I can't take this anymore." and you go, and you let them out.

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And the puppy gets reinforced negative reinforcement. You're taking away the barrier which gives them their freedom. And so, the puppy learns, "How did I get reinforced? I know, I barked."



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And so, what you create is something called nuisance barking. How do you know you have nuisance barking? When you walk towards the crate and the puppy or the dog hears those footfalls, they stop barking because they know, "Oh yeah, she's on her way to let me out." Avoid nuisance barking by avoiding a puppy who gets anxious in the crate and wants to bark by doing the steps that I mentioned previously, by building up time in that crate and looking for it as something that's fun for them.

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And having them look towards not something that they fear, just something that they can relax. It's my chill time in here. The third thing that people do is constantly have physical contact with their puppy. So, you want your puppy on your lap when you're watching TV, and you're patting them. You want your puppy chewing their bone on your lap. You want your puppy playing with their toys on your lap.

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And so, the puppy starts to build this association that 'where I go you go, we're always together. And this is the way it's always going to be until you want to go out for a social evening. Unless you're one of the beautiful people that can put your puppy in your purse and take them out. But I digress.

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The fourth thing is something that a lot of people are told by dog training instructors. And it really isn't a great idea. And that is something called tethering or umbilical training. Now there are two different types of tethering. There's tethering a dog to a stake, not something that I would do, but I wouldn't care if you trained your dog to do it.

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If you say, you want to take your dog to a picnic and wanted them to hang out in the fresh air with the family. But what I'm talking about is when dog training schools tell their people that you want to tether your puppy to your waist so that they have to follow you around all day long. I am not a fan of this for a number of reasons.

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Number one, you are making that puppy a hostage. Now the thought process is you are helping to develop a strong bond because the puppy learns to go everywhere you go. And you may in fact, get that outcome by doing this, but I've got that outcome, and I've never done that. I've got that outcome because I play fun reinforcing games with my dogs.

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So tethering isn't necessary. Why I don't like it, number one is it's a pain in the butt for the person who has this puppy hanging around their waist to get anything done in a day. Number two, as I mentioned, the puppy is a hostage. There is no choice. You must do what I want to do. Number three, you don't give the puppy the chance to self-regulate.

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The puppy doesn't learn to go off and sleep somewhere because they're always being dragged around with you. And number four, it contributes to a puppy suffering from separation anxiety because they're learning 'where you go, I go. We are always together. We are chained together at the waist, and then suddenly you're not, and the world is different.



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So, spending some time to create a dog or a puppy who absolutely is a hundred percent fine with “I got my stuff. I got my deal. I’m chilling in my house while you’re gone doing whatever you need to do.” Now, note that this is temporary. All puppies grow up, and they grow to be relaxed and responsible dogs. And none of my dogs have to go in a crate, but funny enough, they almost all choose to be in a crate when I leave the house.

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I have open crates that they just like to hang out in. You know, this pandemic has really increased the amount of time that we spend together at home with our dogs. And so, any dog, it’s not just puppies now that are going to benefit from the protocols that I’ve mentioned here in this podcast.

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Take the time, just get your dog comfortable with you being away so that you know a hundred percent that they’re chill, that you can come home to have a dog who is completely happy, and you don’t have to worry about what you might see when you open that door. There’s nothing better than leaving the house and coming back knowing that your puppies are completely happy.

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You’ve enjoyed your night out, or you’ve enjoyed a day at work, if that’s possible, and come home and now have some fun with your dog. That’s it for me. I’ll see you next time on Shaped by Dog.

Resources:

[Podcast Episode 30: Why Dog Crates Are Not Dog Cages](#)

[Blog Post: A Day in the Life of a Susan Garrett Puppy](#)

[Podcast Episode 70: Critical Info for Your Puppy’s First Day and Night at Home](#)

[YouTube Video: Perch Work Dog Tricks \(Pivots and Spins\)](#)

[Crate Games Online](#)

[Susan Garrett’s Puppy Videos: Playlist on YouTube](#)



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About Susan

A world-leading educator of dog trainers, Susan is also one of the most successful agility competitors of the last three decades. She has won multiple Gold Medals at National or World Championship events with every dog she has ever owned over the past 30 years. Susan was one of the very first dog trainers to share knowledge online when she opened her “Clicker Dogs” website many years ago. Susan has helped hundreds of thousands of people enjoy a great relationship with their dogs through her workshops and keynote speaking around the world, award winning books, DVDs, magazine articles, blog posts, podcasts, free dog training and dog agility video series, and online dog training programs.



A natural teacher and an entertaining speaker, Susan is world renowned for her dog training knowledge and practical application of that knowledge. Her understanding of how to apply science-based learning principles to both competitive and family pet dog training has been pivotal in changing how dogs are trained.

Susan is now helping many thousands of dog owners in 82 countries have the best relationship possible with their dogs. The real joy for her comes from bringing confidence to dogs and their owner through playful interactions and relationship building games that are grounded firmly in the science of how animals learn.



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