

Do you feel bad when you have to leave your dog home alone? Many people do. It's only natural. But life goes on and we must go along with it.

It's a busy world. And like most of us, you've got places to go, things to do and people to see. Whether you're off to work, school or shopping, or out for a nice dinner and a movie, chances are you spend a lot of time away from home. And much of the time, your dog cannot come along.

Dogs have very little to occupy their time while you're gone. (We're their entertainment.) Some dogs seem content to nap away their day while you're away. Other dogs have a much harder time coping with the situation when they're home all alone. These dogs can suffer from boredom, stress or separation anxiety.

So how do you know if your dog is unhappy about being left alone?

Some dogs make it quite obvious by leaving a trail of destruction behind. You could return home to find your furniture or personal belongings chewed up, the garbage ransacked, paper or pillows may be chewed to shreds, or you may find that your dog has vomited, urinated or defecated in the house. Some dogs eat everything in sight when you're away, and others become almost anorexic. Some dogs groom themselves incessantly to calm their nerves. Others vocalize their dissatisfaction by howling, whining and barking while you're away. (And if you have neighbors nearby, you're sure to hear about it!)

If your dog is bored, anxious, depressed or destructive while you're away, "environmental enrichment" can help. When you give your dog plenty of fun things to do and see, his unhappy time alone can be transformed into a very satisfying day. Here are some suggestions:

- Hire a dog walker
- Invest in doggy day care
- Leave plenty of fun toys for your dog (like puzzle toys that you fill with treats)
- Tire him out with some active play before you go
- Try something that will really hold his interest