

Dog: Independence Training



You probably want to spend every moment with your puppy, but that can give you problems if you ever hope to leave your puppy home alone. Dogs are intensely social, and your puppy has spent his life so far in the constant company of his mom and littermates. Being alone won't come naturally. Allow your puppy to adjust gradually by starting alone-time training right away.

General alone-time guidelines:

- Walk and/or play with your puppy before leaving him alone. Make sure he has gone potty just before you leave.
- Arrange for your puppy to get bathroom breaks every half hour to begin with, then once an hour until he's accident-free.
- Provide plenty of puppy-friendly toys, puzzles, brainteasers, and other alone-time activities.
- Feed your puppy all his meals using food-dispensing toys like KONG® toys.

KONG-Stuffing Pointers

Dogs are genetically programmed to hunt for their food, and many behavior problems can be traced back to the lack of mental challenges we give companion dogs today. Do your puppy and yourself a favor and make dinnertime a puzzle every time. Start with an easy-to-get-to KONG stuffing, and then gradually make the task harder as your puppy gets older and more adept at problem solving.

For easy KONG stuffing, use small, easy-to-fall-out pieces and pack them loosely.

For more difficult KONG stuffing, use some big pieces that take concerted effort and hole-squishing to get in (and thus will be difficult to extract), and pack the pieces tighter.

- Use a matrix (peanut butter, cream cheese, canned food, baby food) to hold the smaller bits in.
- Stuff meat, mashed potatoes, etc. in the KONG and freeze it. Alternatively, plug the small hole with peanut butter and fill the cavity with broth, then freeze this to make a "Kongsicle." (This can be messy; it's best to give it to your dog outside.)
- Stuff cheese cubes in the KONG, then briefly microwave it to coat the insides.

Tip: Clean your KONG toys regularly with a bottlebrush or in the dishwasher.

A KONG-Stuffing Recipe

Layer 1: Roasted unsalted cashews, freeze-dried liver bits.

Layer 2: Dog kibble, cookies or Liver Biscotti, Cheerios, sugar-free/salt-free peanut butter, dried banana chips.

Layer 3: Baby carrot stick(s), turkey and / or leftover ravioli or tortellini, dried apples, dried apricots.

Pack everything as tightly as possible. The last item in should be a dried apricot or piece of ravioli, presenting a smooth finish under the main hole. Bon appétit!