

TIP SHEET: HELPING PETS ADJUST TO YOUR ABSENCE

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, your pets have helped you cope with added stressors, distracted you from the uncertainties of the future and provided companionship and comfort. In turn, they have relished your extra presence and attention while you have been staying safe and healthy at home.

Leaving your pet more often, and in particular if you are planning a return to your work site, may be difficult for both of you. Pets that were adopted during COVID-19 may find it especially disorienting they only know being with you at home all day.

A PET'S NEW NORMAL

Though you may be excited to do more activities, go on a vacation or head back to your workplace, your pet may be less than thrilled. There are several easy things you can do to start preparing your pet for your longer absences from home.

ESTABLISH A NEW SCHEDULE

Pets thrive on routine so begin the adjustment as soon as possible. Start the day earlier to re-establish your dog's morning walk time or play with your cat indoors to wear them out. Reduce outdoor breaks and stretch evening feeding time later and later. Creating a new, consistent timetable will make pets more resilient when you begin to leave the house more often or for full days.

CREATE ROUTINES

Pets recognize details in your daily schedule, such as when you are getting ready to make food or winding down for bed. If you wear specific clothes or carry a particular bag for work or activities, begin to do so again. Get ready and even leave the house to "practice". Give your pet a treat as you walk out the door, so they are excited for you to leave.

PRACTICE PET SOCIAL DISTANCING

If your dog or cat's favorite spot has been at your feet, start encouraging them to spend more time in their bed or crate, another room or outside in a fenced yard. Once they settle down, reward them with a treat. Gradually increase their alone time, so pets can be accustomed to being by themselves.

PROVIDE DISTRACTIONS

Work some extra exercise for your pet into the day. Longer walks or playtime interactions help burn energy, so pets are more likely to stay relaxed and calm. An interactive puzzle toy, a new chew toy or an automatic food feeder can also keep them occupied and provide mental stimulation.

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SERVICES TO CARE FOR YOUR PET

If you live with family, friends or roommates, try to align work schedules so your pet is not left at home alone for an extended period of time. If this isn't possible, consider some additional resources:

- **Indoor Potty.** Begin training for your dog to use absorbent puppy pads or a strip of artificial turf if needed.
- **Daily Check-In.** A neighbor, friend or family member may be available and willing to check on your pet or let them out. Also ask neighbors to listen for constant dog barking while you're away. If that's the case, you may want to arrange more consistent help during the day, like a dog-walker or pet daycare.
- **Reciprocal Playdates.** If you know others with pets, set up a playdate to see if they get along well together. Work out a schedule where you care for each other's pets in your homes sometimes. The pets will benefit from having a companion, and you and the other owner can have peace of mind that your pets won't be lonely and bored.
- **Pet Sitting.** If you have a local family member or friend who is at home during the day, ask if they would be willing to allow your pet to come over once a week, on a set schedule or perhaps even daily. They may appreciate the companionship, especially if they live alone. You may want to offer payment or barter to help with household chores, child care or pet care in return.
- **Local Pet Services.** There are many reliable services available to help take care of your pets. Ask your vet, family and friends for recommendations. Rover.com is a mobile app that can also help you locate local boarding, house sitting, drop-in visits and daycare for your pets.
- **Daycare.** Although these services are often expensive, if your pet is highly social or you're concerned about safety if they're left alone, you may want to evaluate pet daycare options.

WHEN A PET ISN'T ADJUSTING WELL

If your pet is showing uncharacteristic or troubling behaviors as you begin to spend more time away from home, a visit with your veterinarian can be helpful to ensure the pet is in good health and rule out any potential medical causes. Medication to help soothe your pet while you are separated may be discussed. If your pet appears to be healthy and continues acting out, a professional trainer or behaviorist may be of assistance in addressing these concerns.

Starting now to ease your pet into a new routine will make the transition to more time apart easier for both of you. For additional assistance, SupportLinc offers guidance and expert referrals for local pet care resources by calling 1-888-881-5462.