

Preparing our pets for a post COVID-19 world

From the recent events and situation we have found ourselves in – more than ever, people have been cherishing their pets and enjoying the extra time spent together. As so many of us have been quarantining, the routine of the house has likely changed dramatically and your dogs (and other pets) have gotten very used to you being home all the time.

As restrictions are starting to ease, the good news is that we have plenty of strategies to put into place to prevent separation anxiety and unwanted stress on our pets - they've comforted us so much throughout this period, the best we can offer back is to gradually and positively ease them back into a routine that somewhat resembles what they experienced before COVID-19.

Here are some tips on how to go about this!

Start to have your pet gradually spend more time on their own - but always paired with something delicious such as a stuffed **KONG***, bully stick or puzzle toy perhaps. Build this up over the days and weeks ahead and ensure they do not always have access to you when you are home. Creating an interesting environment for your dog to explore and be engaged in when you are not home (and when you are) is important to help build independence. You may also play calming music or have the radio on when you leave, and as you get busier and out more often - ensure your pet enjoys some rigorous exercise in order for them to be more relaxed when you are not home, but allow a little time for them to settle before you do leave for the day. No big fuss when you leave, no big fuss when you arrive home.

If they are over-reactive to noises and things they can see from a window or door, ensure you close blinds or manage the environment in such a way as to reduce this stimulus.



Start to build up gradual departures without taking your pet – go slow and ensure when you leave and arrive back, you don't make a big fuss. If you do, there is a big contrast between when you are home and when you are out and your pet may begin to be uncomfortable with you not being home.

If you've been taking them absolutely everywhere with you, slowly start to reduce these trips, gradually and gently, not all of a sudden.

If your pet has had a lot of extra walks, also consider reducing these a little – but remember to leave them with something they enjoy, that they can be well invested in while you're out (not a rope toy for example which is always more fun when you are interacting with them). You may also want to look into a dog walker or daycare (if appropriate), either for the first time or contact your usual dog walker to get your dog back into their previous routine.

This one is a little hard, but it's all for the good of our pets. Less attention!

If you or the kids have absolutely showered your pets with attention during isolation, consider gradually easing off on this little by little. The goal is to ease our pets gently back into their usual routine of the family being at work/school/uni, so we need to ensure our pets are creating a positive association with being left alone, as well as getting good amounts of daily practice at it.

None of these measures are designed to have you love your pets less! In fact they are designed to help them readjust to a routine where the family are likely around a whole lot less and to be comfortable with that.

Lort Smith has a number of qualified animal behaviourists. If you need further assistance or recommendations for trainers, dog walkers or day care facilities, don't hesitate to contact us.



**Remember to always introduce your dog to their KONG under supervision so you can identify their chewing temperament, and determine if you can safely leave your dog with their KONG.*



Lort Smith
caring for animals

Animal Hospital
24 Villiers Street
North Melbourne VIC 3051

03 9328 3021

Adoption Hub
38 Villiers Street
North Melbourne VIC 3051

03 9287 6426

lortsmith.com