**Creating a Safe Space**

**(also for separation anxiety)**

One of the most important things we can do for dogs to help them feel comfortable when alone or when visitors arrive is to create a very safe space for them. This space should be some place off the main path of home so the dogs are not continually exposed to the visitors and should be relatively small (using baby gates covered by a blanket is a great option). You want to prepare the space with a variety of calming aids like Through A Dog’s Ear, DAP, calming mists (lavender), or things like rescue remedy. You can have dog bed(s), an open crate, chew toys, and other comforts to keep them at ease.

Once you have the room set up, you have to condition it to being a great place to hang out. So you will spend a week or two (depending on the comfort level of your dog—those already showing separation anxiety may take longer) going through the process of making that room and being in it alone a good thing.

1. Make sure the DAP or aromatherapy mists have had time to permeate the room. Start playing the calming music a few minutes before going in the room. Bring Fido in the room and give him a frozen kong. You will hang out in the room while your dog eats their Kong and relaxes but don’t engage with your dog. You can start on the floor with them, but after a day or two, move further away while your dog finishes.
2. When the dog is comfortable with that routine, you will prep the room and give him a kong while you stand/sit right outside the room but still in view. Over the course of a few days you are going to move further from the doorway. Make sure you release the pup BEFORE he starts getting anxious in the room.
3. When he’s comfortable with you outside the room but in view, you will start walking out of view. At first it’s only for a few seconds but as he’s successful at not panicking about you being out of view, you will increase the time you are out of sight. If your dog has been quiet with you out of sight, when you come back insight, toss a few treats into the room for him as a bonus.
4. Keep working this process and increasing the time you are out of sight. Each time you reappear and your dog is quiet, toss in extra treats. You want to be able to have your dog comfortable and alone (or with a canine friend) for at least an hour or more.
5. When you can have your dog relaxing in that room for an hour or more with you at home but out of sight, you can start working your way out of the front door OR inviting people over while your dog relaxes in his room.

You can use the music and the DAP but until the pup is reasonably comfortable with you out of the house, don’t just leave him in the safe place because he will start feeling that it isn’t a very safe space at all.