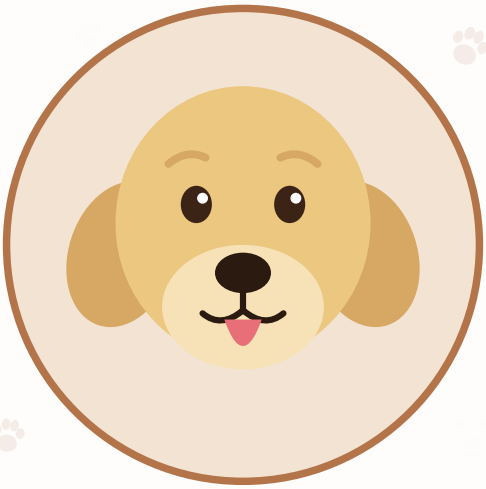


FREE BONUS GUIDE

The Home Alone Blueprint

Calm, confident time apart for your Labrador.

Bonus guide for The Complete Labrador Guide

Before We Begin

You love your Labrador. But right now, leaving the house might feel impossible. Maybe you hear howling as you walk to the car. Maybe you come home to a chewed door frame, a puddle by the door, or a dog so frantic to see you that it takes ten minutes to calm them down.

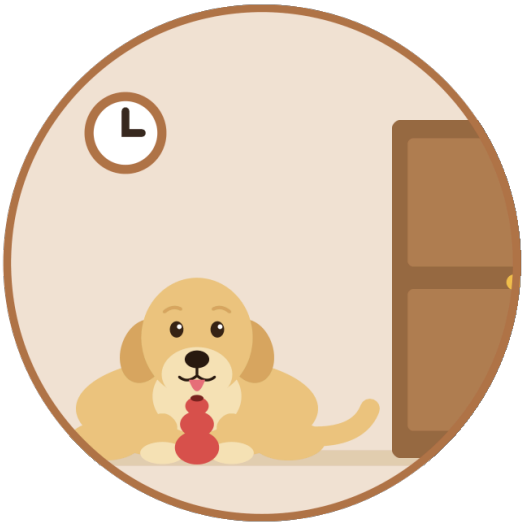
Maybe you've stopped going out at all.

If that's you, please know two things. First, **this is not your fault**, and your dog isn't being naughty or spiteful. Second, **this can get better.** Labs were bred to work side by side with people, and they adore company. Being apart doesn't come naturally to them, but it can be learned, one small, successful step at a time.

This blueprint walks you through the exact steps. It takes patience: most dogs need 4–12 weeks. But every day you follow it, your dog's confidence grows.



Before We Begin





The Velcro Assessment

Before you start, you need to know what you're dealing with. Set up a phone, laptop or pet camera to record your dog, then leave the house as normal for 20–30 minutes. Watch the recording later and tick what you see.

In the first 5 minutes

- ☐ Whining, barking or howling
- ☐ Scratching or chewing at the door
- ☐ Pacing, panting or drooling
- ☐ Ignoring a food toy left for them

Later on

- ☐ Settling, then getting into mischief after a while
- ☐ Chewing household items, but looking relaxed
- ☐ Barking at noises outside

When you come home

- ☐ Frantic greeting that lasts several minutes
- ☐ Accidents in the house
- ☐ Wet fur around the mouth from drooling

What your results mean

- **Mostly first-5-minute signs:** this is **separation distress**. Your dog is worried about being alone. Follow every part of this blueprint, slowly.
- **Mostly "later on" signs:** this is more likely **boredom**. Your dog needs more exercise and brain work before you leave, and more to do while you're gone. Parts 2, 6 and 7 will help most.
- **A mix:** very common. Start with the full plan.

> **When to see your vet first:** if your dog injures themselves, breaks out of crates, damages doors or windows trying to escape, or is in obvious panic the whole time you're out, please speak to your vet before starting. Some dogs need medical support to make learning possible, and that's nothing to be ashamed of.

The "cry it out" myth

A common piece of advice is to "let them cry it out." For a bored dog testing the rules, ignoring demand whining can work. For a dog in real distress, it doesn't. Each long, stressful absence teaches your dog that being alone *is* frightening, and the problem grows.

The key rule of this blueprint is: **as far as possible, your dog only experiences absences they can cope with.**

Your Toolkit

Gather these before you begin:

- **A camera.** You must be able to see how your dog is really doing. Guessing doesn't work.
- **A safe space:** a quiet room, a puppy pen or a crate (only if your dog already loves it). Away from the front door and windows.
- **Baby gates** to create distance inside the house.
- **Two or three special food toys,** such as rubber toys you can stuff with wet food and freeze. These are *only* given when you leave.
- **Background sound:** a radio, soft music or white noise to mask outside noises.
- **A training diary:** a notebook or phone note to record each session.
- **Back-up help:** a dog walker, friend, family member or daycare for the days you need to be out longer than your dog can manage.

Before every practice session

Your dog should be:

- **exercised:** a sniffy walk, not a frantic ball session
- **fed or snacked,** so they're not hungry
- **toileted**
- **calm** before you start

A tired, satisfied Lab copes far better than one who's bursting with energy.

Independence Starts at Home

Most Labs with home-alone problems also struggle when you're home. They follow you to the bathroom, wait outside the shower and leap up every time you stand. That's where we start, because independence is built in small moments.

The Mat Stay

1. Ask your dog to lie on their mat or bed. Reward.
2. Take one step away. Step back and calmly reward.
3. Build to two steps, three steps, then across the room.
4. Then walk to the door of the room and back.
5. Then step out of sight for one second, and back.

Practise 5 minutes, twice a day. Only move on when your dog stays relaxed.

The Invisible Line

When you're sitting on the sofa, your dog doesn't have to be touching you. Put their bed a few steps away and reward them generously for relaxing there. Over a week, move the bed a little further. Your dog learns that being *near* you, not *on* you, is safe and rewarding.

Independence Starts at Home

Gate Time

Put a baby gate across a doorway. Give your dog a chew on one side while you potter about on the other side, in sight. Start with 2 minutes. Build to 10, then 20. Then step out of sight for a few seconds at a time.

Stop the Shadow

If your dog follows you every time you stand up, practise "boring stands." Stand up, then sit straight back down. Walk to the kitchen, then come straight back. Do this many times a day until your dog stops jumping up every time you move.



Scrambling the Triggers

Your Lab has learned exactly what happens before you leave. Keys jingle, shoes go on, the bag comes out, and their stress starts rising before you've even reached the door. By the time the door closes, they're already panicking.

We're going to make those signals meaningless.

Fake departures

Several times a day, do one of these, then **don't leave**:

- Pick up your keys, then put them down and sit on the sofa.
- Put on your coat, then take it off and make a cup of tea.
- Put your shoes on and watch TV in them.
- Pick up your bag and walk to the door, then turn around.

Aim for 10 fake departures a day for at least two weeks. You'll know it's working when your dog stays lying down while you pick up your keys.



Scrambling the Triggers

Change the order

Mix up the order of your routine. Put your shoes on first one day, your coat first the next. Leave by the back door sometimes. The less predictable your departure looks, the less your dog can wind themselves up.

Calm goodbyes, calm hellos

- **Goodbyes:** no big speeches. Give the food toy, say a quiet "back soon" (or nothing at all), and leave.
- **Hellos:** come in calmly. Put your things down. Wait until your dog has four paws on the floor and is starting to settle, then greet them quietly.

Big emotional goodbyes and excited hellos make absences feel like a big deal. We want them to feel ordinary.



The Micro Departure Plan

This is the heart of the blueprint: real absences, built up so slowly that your dog barely notices them getting longer.

Step 1: Start Tiny

Give your dog their special food toy. Walk out of the front door, close it, and come back in after **10 seconds**. Check your camera to see how they did.

Step 2: Stay Below the Worry Line

Your dog's "worry line" is the length of time they can be alone before they start to show stress: whining, pacing, scratching or stopping eating. Each session should end **before** they reach it.

Step 3: Build Slowly

If your dog stayed calm, increase the time a little next session. A sample ladder:

- 10 seconds, 20 seconds, 30 seconds
- 1 minute, 2 minutes, 3 minutes, 5 minutes
- 7, 10, 15, 20 minutes
- 25, 30, 40, 50 minutes
- 1 hour, then longer

Step 4: Go Back When Needed

If your dog shows worry at any step, go back to the last time that was easy, and stay there for a few days before trying again.

Step 5: Mix Long and Short

Not every session should be longer than the last. A good pattern is: 5 minutes, 2 minutes, 8 minutes, 30 seconds, 10 minutes. This stops your dog bracing for the worst every time.

Step 6: One to Three Sessions a Day

Do 1–3 short sessions a day, with plenty of rest in between. More is not better; your dog needs time to relax again before the next session.

Your Training Diary

After every session, write down:

- how long you were gone
- what your dog did (from the camera)
- whether they ate their food toy
- how they greeted you when you returned

After two weeks, you'll be able to see real progress, even if it doesn't feel like it day to day.

The Departure Paycheck

Your dog needs a reason to look forward to you leaving. That's the job of the departure paycheck: a special, high-value food toy that **only ever appears when you go out**, and disappears when you come back.

How to make a great food toy

1. Mix your dog's kibble with a little wet food, plain yoghurt or mashed banana.
2. Stuff it into a hollow rubber toy, pressing it in firmly.
3. Freeze it overnight. Frozen toys last much longer.
4. Make several at once and keep them in the freezer.



The Departure Paycheck

The rules

- **Only when you leave.** Never give this toy at any other time.
- **Pick it up when you return.** Calmly take it away and put it back in the freezer, even if there's food left.
- **Watch the camera.** If your dog doesn't touch it, that's a sign they're worried. Go back to shorter absences.

Other things to leave

- A snuffle mat with scattered kibble
- A safe, long-lasting chew (choose one your vet is happy with for your dog's size)
- A lick mat frozen with wet food

Always check that anything you leave is safe for your dog to have unsupervised.

Scatter and go

As you leave, scatter a handful of kibble across the floor or a snuffle mat. The first minutes after you go are the hardest, and sniffing helps your dog get through them calmly.

Lab-Specific Situations

The sock collector

Many Labs deal with being alone by finding something of yours to carry, chew or lie on: socks, shoes, cushions, the TV remote. It's comforting for them, but it can be dangerous if they swallow something. Dog-proof the room you leave them in, and leave a safe soft toy and a frozen food toy instead. An old (unwashed) T-shirt of yours in their bed can also help.

The door destroyer

If your Lab scratches or chews at the front door, they're trying to follow you. Don't leave them with access to the front door at all. Use a back room or a gated area, and go back to shorter absences.

The crate escape artist

If your dog fights to get out of their crate, stop crating when you leave. Crate panic can cause serious injuries. Use a dog-proofed room or a pen instead, and only return to the crate once your dog is comfortable being alone.

Lab-Specific Situations

The garden barker

Leaving a Lab in the garden while you're out often leads to fence barking, digging and escape attempts. It also annoys neighbours. Keep your dog inside, in a safe, calm space.

The "fine with my partner" dog

Some Labs cope when one person leaves but panic when their favourite person goes. Have that person do more of the fake departures and Micro Departure sessions, and have other family members take over more of the dog's care.

Work days

Most adult dogs shouldn't be left for longer than about 4 hours at a time. If you work long hours, arrange a dog walker, a friend or daycare, both during training and afterwards.



Managing Setbacks

Progress is rarely a straight line. Expect good days and bad days.

Common causes of setbacks

- a long absence your dog wasn't ready for
- a scary event, such as fireworks, a storm or builders next door
- a change in routine: holidays, a house move, a new baby
- illness or pain

What to do

1. **Don't panic.** One bad day doesn't erase weeks of work.
2. **Go back two steps** on your ladder for a few days.
3. **Check the basics:** exercise, rest, health and routine.
4. **Build back up** slowly.

If your dog keeps going backwards despite following the plan, speak to your vet and a qualified behaviourist.



Your 21-Day Starter Plan

- **Days 1–3:** record your dog alone. Set up the safe space. Start Mat Stays and fake departures.
- **Days 4–7:** add Gate Time and the Invisible Line. Make your first frozen food toys.
- **Days 8–10:** start Micro Departures at 10–30 seconds. Keep doing 10 fake departures a day.
- **Days 11–14:** build to 1–3 minutes if your dog is calm. Keep a diary.
- **Days 15–21:** build towards 5–10 minutes, mixing short and long absences.

After 21 days, keep following the ladder at your dog's pace.



10 Popular Questions Answered

1. How long will this take? Most dogs need 4–12 weeks. Severe cases can take longer.

2. Should I get a second dog? Usually not. Most dogs with separation distress miss their *person*, not another dog.

3. Can I leave the TV on? Yes. Background sound helps mask outside noises that can trigger barking.

4. Should my dog be crated when alone? Only if they're already relaxed in the crate. Never crate a dog who panics in it.

5. What if I have to go out for longer? Use a dog walker, friend, daycare, or take your dog with you.



10 Popular Questions Answered

6. My dog won't eat when I'm gone. Why? Worried dogs often can't eat. Shorter absences will help.

7. Should I tell my dog goodbye? Keep goodbyes short and quiet, or skip them.

8. My dog is fine at night but not during the day. Why? Your dog is used to night-time routines. Daytime absences feel different.

9. Does exercise before leaving help? Yes, especially sniffing and brain work. But exercise alone won't fix real anxiety.

10. When should I get professional help? If your dog injures themselves, damages your home, or isn't improving after several weeks.

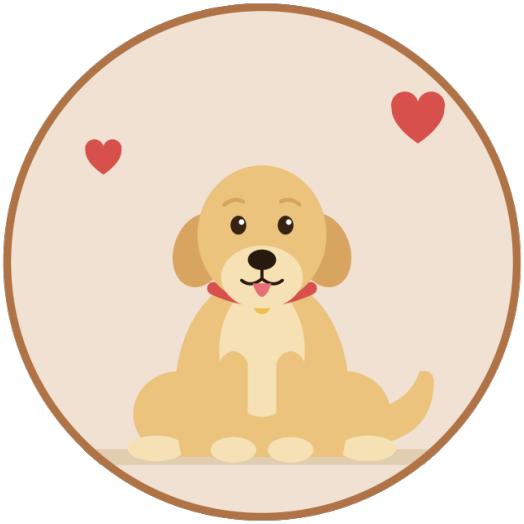


Your Quick Checklist

- ☐ Record your dog alone to understand the problem.
- ☐ Set up a calm, safe space away from the front door.
- ☐ Practise Mat Stays, Gate Time and the Invisible Line.
- ☐ Do 10 fake departures a day.
- ☐ Make frozen food toys for departures only.
- ☐ Start Micro Departures at 10–30 seconds.
- ☐ Keep a training diary.
- ☐ Arrange back-up help for longer absences.



A Final Word



Helping a Lab learn to be alone takes patience, and some days it will feel slow. But every calm minute your dog spends alone is a minute of new learning.

One day soon, you'll pick up your keys, and your Lab will look up, stretch, and go back to sleep.