Preparing dogs for life after Shelter in Place

While dogs are certainly happy to have their people at home and receive a lot of extra walks and attention during the pandemic, it is a good idea to prepare them for when life goes back to normal and their families go back to work and/or school.

Some dogs will quickly get used to having more alone time. For those pets, following these few steps might be enough to adjust to the “back to work” routine.
- exercise dogs prior to leaving the house. A tired dog is a well-behaved dog
- set them up with a safe long-lasting treat (e.g. frozen Kong, Nyla bone)
- and off you go!

Others might need a bit more work. You have time to practice now, so here are some tips to get started on the routine to prevent the anxiety of being left alone:
- Start practicing mini absences (seconds or minutes depending on the dog)
  - Don’t let your dog follow you from room to room. Teach him/her it is OK to be alone for a few minutes, leave him in a room while you head over to the kitchen to prepare some tea for example
  - Go out the front door for a few seconds and come back
- Desensitize your dog to the “going away” clues: pick up you bag or keys, put outside shoes on or jacket, and sit down to watch TV or read a book
- Tone down your departures and arrivals, don’t give them a ton of attention or get super excited before leaving or after returning to the house
- Provide mental exercise (play “find it!” with treats or yourself, practice some tricks)
- Don’t take them with you to every single outing or walk. Teach them that sometimes they get to stay home and relax, while you do your workout

When routine goes back to normal, some dogs might need a break halfway through the day:
- Hire a dog walker or get a friend to walk your dog midday if you are gone for a long stretch of time
- If your dog is too stressed (barking, urinating/defecating, trying to escape) or becomes destructive when alone, find a trainer that can help you set up a routine to treat the separation distress.