



## **Safety and Orientation Checklist for the Home**

### **The Evaluation**

To truly audit these changes, you have to see the house from a different height. Crouch down to your dog's eye level and look at the core zones and essential paths. If you see a shadow that looks like a hole, a mirror that looks like another dog, or a transition between floors that looks like a cliff, your dog is seeing it too.

Addressing those specific visual triggers is often the fastest way to lower their overall stress levels. It is helpful to do this both during the day and at night.

### **Space Management**

1. Identify where your dog spends the majority of their time and close doors to unused guest rooms or dining areas to prevent "searching" behavior.
2. Block the gaps behind furniture or between the bed and the wall using foam wedges or pillows so they cannot wander in and get stuck.
3. Place a large, rounded object (like a floor cushion) in 90-degree corners to turn them into curves, which keeps a pacing dog from hitting a dead end.

### **Traction and Grip**

1. Apply PawFriction directly to the pads of all four feet. This ensures they have a grip on every surface, not just where you have rugs. Reapply when your dog starts to slide again.
2. Consider connecting the bed, water, and door with a continuous path of carpet runners. The change in floor texture provides a tactile "map" for the brain.
3. Use a non-slip mat under food and water bowls to provide a stable base when they shift their weight forward to eat.

## **Visual Cues and Lighting**

1. Cover any reflective surfaces at the dog's eye level, such as floor mirrors or glass cabinets, with frosted film to eliminate "intruder" anxiety.
2. Apply a strip of blue or yellow tape to doorframes to help a dog with fading vision identify where the opening begins.
3. Set timers for interior lamps to activate before the sun sets so the transition to evening doesn't trigger a "sundowning" panic.
4. Use warm-colored nightlights along the floorboards; avoid blue-spectrum LEDs as they interfere with melatonin and sleep cycles.

## **Sleeping Arrangements**

1. Choose a dog bed with high, firm sides. This allows the dog to feel the perimeter of their bed at all times, providing a sense of physical security.
2. Move the bed into a corner so the walls provide an "anchor" on two sides or consider some sort of safety mechanism or stairs to prevent falling off the bed
3. Place a white noise machine near the sleeping area to mask sudden sounds that might cause a startle response.

## **Location Tracking**

1. Equip the dog with a GPS collar (like Tractive, Whistle, or Fi). This is critical for CCD dogs who may wander away without a sense of direction or fail to respond to a recall command when confused.
2. Ensure the GPS unit has a "Live Tracking" mode and a battery life that can handle consistent pings if the dog is prone to wandering.

## **Identification and Visibility**

1. Update microchip information and physical tags to include a "Senior/Needs Meds" or "Dementia/Confused" note. This alerts a finder that the dog isn't just a stray, but a vulnerable pet.
2. Use an LED-illuminated collar or a clip-on light for evening yard time so you can keep visual contact with them from a distance.

## **Home Monitoring**

1. Place a Wi-Fi camera (like a Furbo or Ring) in the "Core Zone" inside. This allows you to check for pacing or distress signals when you are in another room or out of the house, which helps determine if your environmental changes are actually reducing their stress.

## **External Environment and Backyard Safety**

### **Boundary Security**

1. Check the entire perimeter of the fence for gaps or loose boards. Disoriented dogs may "drift" into a fence line and attempt to push through out of confusion, not necessarily a desire to escape.
2. Block off "trap zones" such as the narrow space between a shed and a fence or the area behind large planters where a pacing dog could become wedged.
3. Install self-closing hinges on all gates to prevent accidental "door-darting" if a dog wanders toward the exit while disoriented.

### **Traction and Navigation**

1. Evaluate the surface leading to the "potty spot." If there are slick wooden decks or smooth stone transitions, consider adding outdoor anti-slip strips or textured outdoor rugs.
2. Clear the primary path of any debris, low-hanging branches, or garden tools that could cause a trip or a startle response.
3. Use scent markers near the back door (such as a specific pet-safe outdoor plant or a cedar post) to help a dog with failing vision "smell" their way back inside.

### **Outdoor Lighting**

1. Install motion-activated floodlights that cover the entire yard to eliminate "pitch black" areas that trigger panic.
2. Use solar-powered stake lights to outline the specific path from the door to the grass, creating a "runway" effect for nighttime bathroom breaks.
3. Focus lighting on any steps or changes in elevation; senior dogs often lose depth perception and may hesitate or fall at a single-step transition.

This checklist is more than a list of household chores; it is a clinical intervention. By addressing these environmental stressors, you are directly lowering the daily cortisol levels in your dog's brain.

Start with the high-traffic areas first—the path to the food bowl and the back door—and expand outward as your dog's needs change. Creating a sanctuary is a progressive process, but even the smallest adjustment can be the difference between a night of pacing and a night of restorative rest.