

## THE CANINE COACH

BY VALERIE BROADWAY



**T**HE HOLIDAY SEASON is here and people are busier than any other time of the year. For most people, it is an exciting time. What is often not recognized is it can be stressful time for pets. Here are a few tips to help them navigate the holidays safely and with as little stress as possible:

### PET SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

It is important to pay attention to how pets feel about the situations they are placed in. If they are obviously not enjoying what is going on, remove them from the festivities to a quieter place in the house. Give them a favorite toy or chew to focus on and perhaps play some soft music or have the TV on to help drown out noises that may stress them.

Children are understandably excited during the holidays and may move too quickly

## Holiday planning tips for stress-free, relaxed pets

or enter a dog's personal space, causing anxiety for some dogs. In other situations, excited children add to the energy level of already easily excitable dogs. These dogs may in turn jump on, knock down, or scratch the children. Consider dogs as another child in the mix. If dogs are being stressed by the kids or visa-versa adults should intervene. Responsible adults must always monitor and respond to interactions between children and dogs, or any pet.

Persons under the influence of drugs or alcohol have increased chances of being bitten by dogs. As far as dogs are concerned intoxicated people talk and behave strangely causing them feel uncomfortable. People who are inebriated sometimes don't recognize the cues dogs are giving. They walk right into dogs' personal space, ignoring all of the canine warning signs. At some point some dogs feel they have no other option but to go to the next level, which is physical aggression.

### TRAVELING WITH AND WITHOUT PETS

Change in routine can be stressful for pets. Try to keep things as close as to normal as

possible. If pets will be left home while the family travels, line up boarding or pet sitting. When pets are being boarded it can help with the transition to have something that smells like home sent with them. A piece of their bedding like a blanket, one of their toys, or a tee shirt their human has worn.

When dogs are traveling by car they should be tethered inside the vehicle by a harness (not by the collar) and seatbelt adapter (\$10 at most pet stores) or be secured in a crate. This will keep the dog and humans safe in the event of a crash and keep them from slipping out of the door during stops for gas or food. Cats should be in crates while traveling. The unusual super-socialized, calm cat may be able to travel using the same harness method, just described, as dogs. When away from secured areas it's important leashed pets have their collars or harnesses tight enough so they can't slip off if a pet gets spooked or is being defiant. Be sure pets wear identification tags with the owner's cell phone number on them. Even if pets are micro-chipped tags are the quickest way to be reunited with pets when they are lost.

Unless pets can ride in the cabin it's not a good idea to travel with them by air. This mode of transportation is very stressful and potentially dangerous. Animals can be scarred for life after just one plane ride.

Many holiday get-togethers have been ruined when a dog fight breaks out. This typically results when visiting dogs and resident dogs clash. It often happens immediately upon arrival of the visiting dogs. They are set up for disaster when the visiting dogs' human walks them into a home where

have never met the resident dog(s). Most dogs don't respond well to an unfamiliar dog entering their home environment. To avoid this type of confrontation, upon arrival to the holiday destination, the dogs should be taken for a walk around the block together. This allows them to

get to know each other on neutral territory. The introduction generally takes less than 20 minutes. Once in the house, keep the dogs on leashes until they are comfortable around each other. (NOTE: If a dog cannot stop staring at

another dog it is not comfortable.)

An alternative introduction method is to crate the visiting dog for an hour or two in a main area of the home while the dogs get used to each other being in the house together. Once out of the crate, if needed, keep one or both dogs on leashes until they seem completely comfortable together. However, some dogs will never get along together. If this is the situation, then alternate dogs between being in the crate, being loose in the house, and being in the yard.

Some people will leave cats home alone with a supply of food and water to last for the duration of the trip. Cats are more independent but they do get lonely and stressed if left alone for more than a day or two. It is best to have someone to stop in for a visit to check on them. In addition to keeping the cats company, this is done because sometimes accidents or health issues occur that require immediate human intervention. Recently, there was a story in the news about a cat turning on a water faucet and flooding the house while being left alone for three days. In hindsight, I bet they wish they would have arranged for a pet sitter.

### PET EMERGENCIES

Whether home or away have a plan just in case a pet needs emergency veterinary attention. It can be difficult to think straight while panicking, so be proactive and keep the pet's regular vet and local emergency vet phone numbers handy. Medical issues that happen around the holidays often involve pets eating things that make them sick. The Pet Poison Helpline is (855)764-7661 or online at [www.petpoisonhelpline.com](http://www.petpoisonhelpline.com). This is one option to get helpful information anytime about what foods, plants, and medications are dangerous for pets. Hotlines like this typically charge a small fee for callers to talk with professionals during actual emergencies.

Another potential danger for pets can be holiday decorations. Take necessary precautions especially if there are puppies or kittens around. Be careful about toys your pet may receive during the holidays, or any time year. Just because stores sell them doesn't mean toys are safe. Know your pets play habits. Pets with a rougher chew style who try to eat them may not be able to have certain toys. Avoid toys that contain batteries, as they can be deadly if ingested.

### PETS AS GIFTS

During the holiday season, if the plan is to give puppies or kittens as gifts, wait until after the height of the celebrating to bring them into the home. It is almost always a stressful time for animals to relocate. It helps them immensely to have a few calm days to adjust. Perhaps give a picture or a stuffed animal that represents the new pet and then introduce them into the family on a quieter day.

While the holidays can be happy, fun, and meaningful for people they can be overwhelming for pets. With some planning and preparation, it is possible to reduce their stress levels. This allows everyone to stay safe and not distract from having a good time and making wonderful memories that last a lifetime.

Valerie Broadway, the Canine Coach, is a dog trainer and behavioral specialist. For more information, call 919-542-4726 or visit [www.caninecoachingservices.com](http://www.caninecoachingservices.com).



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