



Holidays and the Family dog.

By Jennifer Shryock

Visiting family and friends is a wonderful part of the Holiday season. This is great fun for most 2 legged family members but may be confusing and stressful for the 4 legged varieties. This is often not considered from our companion's perspective. Changes in daily routines, usually quiet but suddenly now crowded rooms, and excited children can often lead to confusion and miscommunication between the resident dog and guests. Here are some tips to help keep everyone safe as you visit your dog loving family and friends.

1. Fear of dogs. If you or your child is fearful of dogs consider asking the host ahead of time if the dog can be secured in another room or put on a leash to help ease the fear. If you know ahead of time that this is a consideration you may bring the dog a special gift of his own to enjoy in a designated place. Fearful responses of a child or adult may increase the risk of a bite. It is important that the guests fear be validated and measures are taken to ease the stress for all. www.doggonese.com has great info to help those with fears especially children.

2. SUPERVISE at all times. Even the best family dog that loves kids may become irritated and tired during the holidays changed routines. They may even try to communicate this by licking their lips, turning away, moving away, yawning etc we often do not recognize this dog language. This can lead to a more direct form of communication that we all recognize...a growl or snap. Being aware of subtle cues dogs offer can make everyone more comfortable. To become familiar with some simple doggie communication at <http://www.familypaws.com/communication>

3. Noisy toys. New sounds make some dogs nervous and fearful. As the children open gifts stay aware of the dog and its responses to the new toys. It is safest to put your dog on a leash if you are unsure of their response to such toys.

4. Whenever a group of kids get together there is bound to be screaming, running and a great deal of giggling. Be aware of your dog's posture. Often this activity makes dogs anxious or unsure. They do not know if this behavior is ok or of concern. Many dogs will pace or pant and scratch while others will try to intervene and "break up" the group of kids. When things get loud and noisy have a plan for your dog. Think ahead of the boundaries you want set for activity with your dog and where your dog will be during all of the activities.

4. Remote control toys and fast moving hot wheels may be of interest to dogs that like a good chase or whom have high prey drive. Your dog may do better outside or in another room away from the tempting toy for now while it is still new. This will allow your child to safely enjoy the new gift.

5. Clean up wrapping and ribbons promptly to prevent curious dogs or cats from ingesting these items. Ribbons can cause deadly consequences internally.

6. Chocolate is toxic to pets.

7. Dog toys. Dogs that normally do not guard their toys or food may be more likely to do so with children or guests. Always leave dogs alone while enjoying toys or treats.

8. Resting dogs need to be left alone and not approached. SUPERVISION is a must for small children.

9. Crowded rooms lead to more potential for conflict. When activity level is high and there are close quarters offer the dog another quieter space to avoid conflict.



10. Children must be taught to respect a dog's space. Chasing and hugging dogs is not safe. Encourage hide and seek and fetch or other fun games that are safe. Visit www.doggonesafe.com and www.familypaws.com for more fun ideas.

There is an increase in dog bites around the holidays due to children being home from school and the many family gatherings. Dogs are a wonderful part of our lives but it is our responsibility to keep them safe and recognize that they are still animals and not people with fur. Statistics indicate that the family dog is most often the biter. I hope that this information helps keep some family dogs and children safer this holiday season.