



A New Year: A New Life

When the Holidays End

By Barbara Kahn

The holiday madness is finally over. The visitors have all gone. The decorations are put away and life gets back to normal. Or does it? Reality now sets in. That new dog you acquired during the holiday season is no longer an exciting gift. She has become a permanent member of your family. Face it: your life is not really going to return to what it once was.

Dogs are labor intensive pets and, like having a new baby in your home, you will need to make some adjustments. You may need to wake earlier and retire later to accommodate your dog's exercise and elimination schedule. If you took time off to acclimate your pet to her new home, her schedule will again be disrupted when you return to work. If your job keeps you away for long hours, you may have to make arrangements for someone to stop by to care for her while you're gone. Maybe you'll need to skip lunch with your colleagues and head home to take spend time with the dog yourself.

Perhaps the income you generally earmark for entertainment will now have to be reserved for dog food, treats, pet sitting services, installing a fence, veterinary bills, toys and, hopefully, a sensible and humane training program. Whether or not you enjoy winter weather, snow, ice, wind and cold can't deter you from making sure your dog gets out for potty breaks and regular daily exercise.

Adding a dog to your household irrevocably changes your life. Budgets and schedules change. Gone are the days of going out with colleagues directly after work. Several weeks of sleepless nights may occur while a young pup adjusts to its new household, longs for its littermates and mom, and builds the physical control and understanding that allow her to sleep throughout the night. There may be potty accidents, chewed belongings, frustration and anxiety. Jumping on people and things, mouthing everyone and stealing everything within reach are natural, normal dog behaviors.





Dogs are natural scavengers and consider everything within reach a food item or chew toy, so you may need to “redecorate.” That means removing all the household items you’ve always had handy and readily available until your dog is dependable. When it comes to exercise, most dogs need more than just a walk on leash. Safe, off leash exercise and creative mental stimulation is imperative despite inclement weather, an owner’s illness or a busy work schedule.

Incorporating a dog into your household sometimes feels like a daunting task. Despite the additional work, expense and supervision required, consider all you’ll be gaining. Watching a dog frolic in the snow can fill your soul with pleasure. The silly behaviors dogs offer make us laugh when nothing else seems amusing. The love they give us is boundless and without restrictions. The fact that our dogs choose to be with us, to learn from us, to work for us is quite amazing. They bring new friends into our lives, teach us about accepting and living each day to its fullest and give us a great excuse to act like kids again ourselves.

So how can we make integrating into our lives as stress free as possible?

There are two ways to integrate this dog into your household: the hard way and the easy way. Here are some easy-to-follow suggestions that will make life as enjoyable as possible for you and your puppy.

Until your dog is dependable in housetraining and respecting your belongings, manage her intelligently. Leave a leash on her when you’re home. Having the dog drag a leash around will allow you to exert control over her effortlessly.

Total supervision and sensible confinement will prevent problems from occurring.

Active efforts to socialize your dog to all sorts of people, places and things will maximize your dog’s potential and help avoid socially unacceptable behaviors from developing. Even adult dogs need to be part of a world larger than their backyards to maintain their social skills.





Provide a safe environment including secure fencing and dog-proofing both your yard and your home.

And prioritize training in the same way as you would value education for human children. Motivational training with help from an experienced professional will help you and your family develop a bond with your pet that will make your dog want to be with you and try to meet your expectations. Building a relationship based on trust, respect and mutual communication takes time and effort but nothing is more important in your quest to end up with a pet you can enjoy for life.

Creating a dog that's a joy to live with requires dedication, commitment and a willingness to take the time and make the effort necessary to develop a mutually rewarding relationship.

So life isn't the same any more. It's infinitely better. Lucky you!

Q & A

From T. in Browns Mills, a question about housetraining and the older dog.

Question: T. has two dogs that, due to a major change in T's lifestyle, are now left alone for 10 hours a day. One dog is an adult, unspayed female. The other is a neutered male at least 8 years of age. Both dogs are housesoiling and if T. yells at them when she returns home and finds a mess, the male dog snarls at her.

Answer: *T. needs to know that 10 hours is an incredibly long time for most dogs to remain clean. Because of her work schedule, T. may need to engage the services of a pet-sitter to come in during the day and allow the dogs out to potty. The older male may also be experiencing some medical problems so a complete medical examination including CBC/Chemscreen and urinalysis are in order. And, since her female dog is still intact, her male dog may be marking territory to indicate she belongs to him. T. was planning to have the female dog spayed anyway, so we recommended putting that on the schedule as soon as possible.*





What about the snarling? If punishment is to be humane and effective, it must occur almost simultaneously with the inappropriate behavior. Yelling at a dog hours or even minutes after he's soiled is confusing and intimidating, causing the dog to become defensive and try to keep his owner at bay. Punishing a dog for housesoiling frequently teaches the dog to eliminate in hidden spots and does not teach him to eliminate in appropriate locations. T. must go out with her dogs each and every time for several weeks and reward them every time they eliminate outdoors. T. has agreed not to yell at her dogs for soiling but to do a better job of arranging their living situation to accommodate their needs.

From Barb via email, a question about nuisance barking.

Question: Barb and her husband recently added another dog to their household. They adopted a young female Shetland Sheepdog . The Sheltie is very noisy and every movement that her owners or pack mates make starts a round of excited barking. The racket resolves temporarily only when Barb puts the dog on her lap and strokes her. As soon as Barb puts her dog back on the floor, the barking resumes.

Answer: *Certain behaviors in dogs are genetically hard-wired. Barking in Shelties is one of those behaviors. To perform its intended task of shepherding, barking was a desired characteristic and vital to a successful breeding program.*

Many techniques can help decrease nuisance barking. Barb had already tried squirting her dog with water while she barks but that technique has met with little success. Using a citronella no-bark collar was not an option since the other dogs in the household would also have been impacted by it.





Instead, we discussed teaching her dog to bark on command and “shush” on cue. By teaching a dog to do an unwanted behavior on cue (jumping up, barking, etc.), we can decrease the incidence of the behavior by no longer giving the cue. In addition, we pointed out that picking the dog up and stroking her to “comfort and quiet” her was actually reinforcing this behavior. Now, instead of picking the dog up, Barb will either ignore the dog or even leave the room to show her dog that her unwanted behavior will no longer gain her any attention.

