

# Tips for a safe, sane holiday with your dog

There are so many ways for a dog to get into trouble during the holidays that I sometimes wonder how our canine friends survive the season. And if you look at things from your dog's point of view, a lot of our cherished traditions seem just plain crazy.

Why wouldn't a dog want to pee on a tree that suddenly appears in the living room or chew on something that is bright, shiny and dangles right at nose level?

The trick to enjoying the holidays with your dog is to plan, supervise and always take a minute or two to look at the world from its point of view.

Because Christmas trees can be climbed on, pulled down and urinated upon by your dog, it's always a good idea to get the tree in the house and set it up without decorating it for a day or two. This will give you a chance to monitor your dog's behavior before adding fragile or fragrant ornaments. Let your dog satisfy its curiosity by investigating for a bit, but give a verbal reprimand when that curiosity gets too pushy.

Once you decorate, place the most fragile or cherished ornaments higher, just to be on the safe side, and stay away from tinsel. It can be eaten by your dog in the blink of an eye, and while it might add sparkle to its poop, it might also add an emergency visit to the veterinarian.

If your household is relatively sedate most of the year, think of how chaotic the holidays must seem to your dog. Christmas can bring more visits from friends than usual, more noise, more activity and even more appearances by delivery people. A reliable sit/stay, combined with your supervision and a basic management plan can help your dog tolerate running, screaming children, loud dinner parties and surprise visitors.

Begin sit/stay training by practicing with your dog in a quiet, predictable environment. Once it will reliably maintain a sit/stay for you there, you can try more-challenging places such as the backyard or a friend's house and eventually graduate to a busy park. The trick is to help your dog control its impulse to break the stay by practicing in many different environments. Try to maintain your usual positive attitude even if you really don't have the darn time and you need to get your holiday shopping done.

Supervising your dog during holiday events gives you the opportunity to prevent problems instead of merely coping with problems once they arise. Keep your freezer stocked with inexpensive butcher bones stuffed with cheese, peanut butter or meat paste. Stock up on your dog's favorite type of rawhide or chewie. You can preoccupy your dog by providing one of these when you are less able to monitor it.

You also can avoid problems just by adding a management plan to your training and supervision. Management ideas include providing a secure outdoor area to use throughout the day and training your dog to enjoy spending time in a crate.

With careful introduction, most dogs accept crate training easily. The domestic dog (*canis lupus familiaris*) is considered a denning animal, and an affinity for close quarters usually comes naturally.

There are equally good reasons for you to feel comfortable with the crate. As a matter of safety, parents often use a playpen or crib to carefully confine children. You can consider the crate to be the crib of the dog world. It provides a safe environment for your dog when you can't supervise it. Toss a stuffed bone in the crate with your dog, and it just might prefer the crate to the hustle and bustle of a raucous New Year's Eve party.

I hope you enjoy a drama-free Christmas and make training your dog your 2012 New Year's resolution.

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