



BACK-TO-SCHOOL

Tips for Families with Dogs



BACK-TO-SCHOOL time can be stressful for every family member-including the family dog. Follow these tips to help your dog get accustomed to the new routine and avoid bad behaviours.

SEPARATION ANXIETY

With everyone gone to work or school all day, dogs left alone can become stressed, resulting in destructive behaviours and endless barking.

- Pay less attention to your dog –A week before school starts, ignore your dog for increasing amounts of time each day so they get used to not being the centre of attention.
- Start early –Several weeks before school begins, get your dog comfortable with being alone by separating them from the family. If you often take your dog with you to run errands, leave them at home.
- Practice leaving the house –Gather your gear, exit the door, but then come right back in again. Your dog will cease associating the routine of your leaving with your departure and will be more relaxed when you actually leave.
- Be calm and assured –When leaving the house, you inadvertently confuse your dog if you say sweetly, “It’s okay Buster-we’ll be home soon.” If he is feeling concerned about your leaving, your happy, high-pitched voice tone can make him think it’s OK to feel anxious. As pack animals, dogs expect their leaders to be strong when they leave the pack. Therefore, ignore your dog for about 10 minutes before you leave.

BOREDOM

Dogs sleep a lot during the day, but when they wake up, they want something to do. It doesn’t take much to entertain a dog, even when you’re not at home.

- Toys –Dogs love toys, but they can quickly get bored with or destroy them. Buy high-quality, virtually indestructible puzzle toys that hold treats, like the Gamechanger® and KONG® products. Every few days, switch out the toys so your dog has new and fun things to hold their interest.
- Scatter food –Dogs are natural foragers who enjoy looking for food on the ground. Scatter bits of raw vegetables, dog kibble, and other foods that won’t attract wasps around the backyard when you leave. Hide some treats so your dog spends extra time looking for them. Always provide lots of fresh, clean water for them to drink.

SHELTER

Dogs need to have their own "home," a place where they feel secure and comfortable. If your dog doesn’t already have a place of their own, create one for them.

- Crate –Most dogs love the safety of a crate. Because dogs are descended from den-dwelling animals, a crate makes a natural shelter. If your dog hasn’t been crate trained, don’t start training them the day the kids leave for school. That’s too late and can actually add to their stress.
- Laundry room –If you are concerned about your inside-dog toileting in the house, enclose them in a small room (which inhibits the tendency to toilet) and has an easy-clean floor (in case he has an accident). Place a soft bed and toys in the room for them too.
- Doghouse –Be sure your outside-dog has shelter so they can escape the weather. Dogs are more relaxed when they are covered and in familiar surroundings. Place the doghouse next to the house so they feel it is an extension of the larger “den” and add some comfy bedding.

UNUSUAL BEHAVIOUR

A stressed dog can begin to exhibit bad behaviours, such as jumping up or biting. Sometimes a dog will greet children roughly when they arrive home from school, even knocking a child to the floor. After being alone all day, the dog’s pent-up energy may cause him to overreact.

- Train the kids –Train your children to avoid going right to the dog’s area as soon as they get home. Have them ignore the pet for five minutes to allow them to settle down. With young children, it is best to have an adult present to reduce the chance of a problem. Once your dog learns the routine, they will relax.
- Train your dog –It is amazing how quickly dogs learn what is acceptable and what is not. Dogs have a language of their own and once we understand it, we can easily manage them.

