

Article 17

Dear Gus,

My children want a puppy as a holiday gift. They have wanted a dog for some time, but now the begging has reached a new high. What do you think?

Dave S., Orange

Dear Dave,

STOP!

Although well intentioned, getting a puppy during the holidays is the worst time ever to give or get a new addition to the family. Dogs, and especially puppies, need time and routines to adjust well, both of which are in short supply during the holiday season. Travel to relatives, shopping, visitors, entertainment and parties, although good things, all add up to increased stress at this time of year. So the timing can't be worse to add a puppy into the mix. This is not the time to start a relationship with a new dog.

A better idea might be a gift card for a puppy from a reputable breeder or an animal shelter. If you are interested in a purebred, this would give you time to research the different breeds with your children. The various breeds have very different personalities and needs, so you want to match the puppy's personality with your family's lifestyle. For example, dogs from the herding group, which includes German Shepherds, have been bred to herd livestock and therefore they require a lot of exercise. If you are not going to "work" with your dog, this is not the group for you. You want to take the time to make that perfect match that in turn keeps the odds of happily ever after much better.

For everyone that already owns a pet, here are some seasonal safety tips:

If you are traveling any distance with your pet, bring along his or her health information, any medications and a crate for safety and security. It's also a good idea to either have your pet micro-chipped or tattooed for identification if you become separated he might not know the way back to you.

If you have a Christmas tree in the house, remember how curious dog's are about new things. Your pet may see the tree as a new fire hydrant, and eliminate on it. If you use a preservative in the water for the tree, make sure your pet cannot drink it, since some of the types are toxic. Be careful that your pet does not have access to the electrical cords, since chewing on them can result in electrocution. Swallowing tinsel can result in an intestinal blockage, while a broken ornament can cause bad cuts. Poinsettia and holly berries and leaves, even mistletoe, are also poisonous, so these plants should be kept out of your pet's reach. If you have a wood-burning fireplace, make sure that you use a fire screen.

Open trash receptacles have the temptation of poultry bones and other scraps. If your pet eats scraps they can cause a variety of digestive disorders, all the way from vomiting to a lacerated intestine. Chocolate is toxic to dogs, so should be kept away from your pet.

Be aware of any leaking antifreeze in the garage or driveway, since it's sweet taste is very attractive to dogs. Even a small amount of antifreeze can be deadly.

Above all, to both our human and canine companions, have the very best Holiday Season, and a Happy, Healthy, and Prosperous New Year.

Gus Marnel of Milford is the owner of K-9 Communication and a Master Trainer and graduate of the United States K-9 Academy.

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