

HOW TO CELEBRATE THE HOLIDAYS WITH YOUR PET

No matter what your religious beliefs or which holiday(s) you celebrate – whether it is Christmas, Hanukkah or Kwanzaa, you may find this time of year exceptionally exhilarating, exciting, fun, demanding – and STRESSFUL. So many social obligations and commitments. So little time... Well, take a sigh and a deep breath... You CAN survive –yes, and even ENJOY the holidays, and celebrating with your pet can make this time even more enjoyable and meaningful.

1. Go for a winter wonderland walk together – in a snowy park or woods... If you do this, make sure he's dressed for the weather – perhaps a comfortable, loose-fitting sweater and some “snow shoes” to protect his paws from snow or salt. Snow or salt should be removed immediately using a warm, moist towel. If he gets wet from rain or snow, gently towel or blow-dry your dog or cat. Be alert to frostbite – frostbitten skin may be reddish, white or gray and it may be scaly or sloughing. Never let your dog off the leash on snow or ice- especially during a snowstorm or blizzard. Dogs can lose their scent and easily become lost. More dogs are lost during the winter than during any other season. If walking in the dark, use a reflective collar on your pet and wear a jacket with reflective tape. Also carry a working flashlight with you and use it so that you can be seen by other pedestrians as well as motorists. Don't forget to make sure your pet has accurate identification tags with his name and your phone # and address.
2. Cuddle on the sofa together and enjoy a holiday movie. Indulge in the sense of peace and well being, the relief from stress, anxiety and depression your pet provides.
3. Snuggle under the covers together and enjoy a special holiday breakfast in bed, Enjoy some extra love, quality time and interaction in a cozy, comfortable environment.
4. Don't overindulge in food or entertaining. Remember, no alcoholic beverages, chocolate, eggnog, potato pancakes (latkes), Hanukkah gelt, noodle kugle Kwanzaa nuts and fruits, or fruitcake for your pet. Also, please don't give your pets bones, which can splinter and break and lodge in their throats or digestive tract.
5. Give your pet plenty of time out and private space when you are entertaining, and restrict his interaction with too many strangers and strange infants or young children in particular. Make sure he's got a quiet, peaceful place where he can rest away from all the excitement. Make sure he cannot “escape” through open doors as new guests arrive and others exit.
6. Your pet can kiss you and nibble on your ear under the mistletoe, but make sure he doesn't nibble the mistletoe as mistletoe (particularly its berries) are highly toxic to him. You can play dreidel with your pet, but don't let him eat one!
7. If you plan on taking your pet with you during holiday visits, make sure that your host is aware that you're bringing him and that he gets along well with your host's pets. Also,

make sure that your pet is well groomed and well behaved. Make certain he has proper rabies tag and current ID.

8. Limit your pet's social activities – even though he may be a “party animal” he can only tolerate a certain amount of socializing without becoming overly stressed with too many people and too much noise. He may be frightened by new faces and scents and sounds.

9. Do not dress your pet in excessive holiday attire – in other words, No tight ribbons or yarn around his neck, or jingle bell necklaces that can choke him. Instead, try a holiday bandana or cute festive collar.

10. Keep your pet away from such highly toxic substances as “angel hair” or tinsel, Xmas tree ornaments and toys, antifreeze, styrofoam, snow flock, Menorahs, Kwanazaa candles, etc. If you plan on giving your pets holiday gifts, make sure they SAFE toys, such as toys without sharp edges or that aren't shredd able or ingestible.

11. Make sure you always have fresh, clean water available for your pets. This is as important in the winter as it is in the summer. Your dog or cat is just as likely to dehydrate in the winter as in the summer. SNOW or ICE is NOT a suitable substitute for water.

12. Keep your pet warm, dry and away from drafts. Make sure they have blankets or pads on cold floors. Be careful of fireplaces and portable heaters – keep fireplaces screened and heaters out of reach.

13. Have a great time trimming the tree, but make sure that tree is secure in its holder and that you cover or tack down electrical cords. Also, try not to let your pet get entangled in strings of lights or garlands. Make sure your Menorah or Kwanzaa candles are out of range of your pet and that he cannot tip them over and start a fire!!!

14. Remember to enjoy and hug and spend some special holiday quality time with your pet – and to be grateful for and celebrate the unconditional love he brings to you during the holidays and all year round!!!

15. Remember, it is rarely, if ever, a good idea to buy a pet for your children or for anyone for that matter, during the holiday season. A pet is a lifelong responsibility and an on-going commitment. And, a puppy or kitten, in particular require a tremendous amount of care, affection and attention. It needs to adapt to the rhythm of the household – not to the frenetic activity, stress, and unusual amount of socializing and commotion of the holidays. Also, the recipient of a pet needs to prepare mentally, physically and emotionally for the addition to the family and optimally should play a role in determining which type of pet is most appropriate to his/her lifestyle, emotional needs, schedule and

residential accommodations. For example, does he live in an apartment, home, rental house, - does he have a back yard, is he able to walk pet regularly, play with it and provide it with sufficient attention? What is his work schedule like? Can he provide food, water, exercise and medical health on a regular basis?

Also, during the holidays, we are more easily distracted with the ringing of the phone or doorbell, visiting friends and relatives, holiday parties and social functions – all of which require our attention. A pet deserves (and requires) a great deal of attention when being integrated/assimilated into a new home and family. A young pet, in particular, can easily get into mischief or trouble toppling over holiday candles or decorations, chewing toxic ornaments or wires, swallowing or ingesting toxic substances or unhealthy (even fatal) foods, etc. Also, the novelty of owning a brand new puppy can quickly dissipate if the recipient has to make all sorts of adjustments to accommodate the new family member. The thrill of owning a new puppy can quickly become burdensome as the new pet may throw up, urinate in the house, require exercise, regular feeding, medical attention, bathing. Being a good pet owner is a lot of work!!! It is just good common sense to introduce a new pet into the home after the stress, excitement and chaos of the holidays subside.

Deciding to have a pet is an important decision and not to be made lightly, frivolously or spontaneously. It is wise to do your homework and research the type of pets that are available and to determine in advance that which is best suited to your needs and lifestyle. After all, hopefully, your pet will become a beloved friend and family member who will share life with you for a long, long time...