



Oberhund News

FOR REGINA'S DOGS AND THEIR PEOPLE

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Children and Dogs

***"Children have never been very good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them."* – James Baldwin**

What role should children have in the care of the family dog? Some families make the mistake of giving children too much responsibility, setting the child up for failure and, in extreme cases, putting both the child and the dog at risk. Some families make the opposite error and disconnect the children from any role, missing opportunities for child development and a stronger family unit. So what is a good balance?

The child should have some role that reflects his/her maturity and physical capabilities, and parents should consider the consequences to the dog should the child neglect his/her responsibilities. (In other words, don't give the child a role that will put the child or the dog in jeopardy.) Be prepared that the child will make mistakes, and make sure to look out for both the child's and the dog's well-being. For



Sarah, Lulu (Boxer, 5 months), and Sadie

example, if a child is responsible for giving the dog fresh water twice a day, a responsible adult should keep an eye on the water bowl to make sure the dog isn't going too long without water. A child may need reminders at times, but if she forgets, she should be allowed to learn from her mistakes. Help her figure out a method to help her remember: i.e. a chart on the fridge, attaching the task to a part of an established routine or chore (i.e. when she brushes her teeth).

Filling the water dish, feeding, and cleaning up after the dog are common responsibilities bestowed upon children, but what about a child's role in training the dog? There are opportunities at home to have the children help with training, especially when it is integrated into the general care of the dog (i.e. ensuring the dog sits before getting fed), but what about formal dog training classes? I had the opportunity to observe a dog training class taught by Elsie at Pawzitive Attitudes in Regina, a class that uses positive reinforcement methods only and allowed parents to bring their children.

My initial reaction upon hearing about such a class was concern mixed with curiosity: Would the children be able to understand the concepts and learn the skills? Would they be a distraction? Would the parents have trouble controlling their children and their dog for a whole hour? What about the other dogs and their reactions to the children? I know from experience that timing and close observation is essential when teaching children and training dogs, and I wondered how difficult it would be



Peanut (Shih Tzu/Bichon Cross, 4 months) and Davon

to combine the two groups in a formal setting. I decided I needed to see a class for myself and asked Elsie if I could attend a class as an observer.

The evening I attended, there were two families with children and from what I observed, things seemed to work out fine. Sure, there were times when the children lost focus, but they were back on task when it was their turn. The parents did a good job of letting their children participate in elements of the class that were appropriate to their age, and guiding them when needed. (I'm sure Lulu enjoyed the extra treats when Sadie kept filling her hands too full.) Were they distracting to other groups? Not that I could tell.

Continued

Good Reads

Born to Run by Michael Morpurgo (2007). It is catalogued as a junior novel (readers 10 to 16, I'd say) but even adults, especially dog lovers, will enjoy this touching story of a greyhound pup. The author was inspired to write this novel when the truth about the bleak lives of racing dogs was exposed in the media. Don't worry, though: the sad parts are readable for sensitive readers and the story has a satisfying ending.

Dogtown: a sanctuary for rescued dogs by Bob Somerville (2008). Dogtown is a sanctuary for rescued dogs, located in Utah as part of the Best Friends Sanctuary. The book is inspiring and heartwarming, and the photos are beautiful. There is also a DVD called **Dogtown: second chances** (2008). The DVD is wonderful, but far shorter than I had hoped. Both the book and the DVD can be borrowed from the Regina Public Library.

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Children and Dogs (continued)

They seemed attentive and responsive to their parents' direction and Elsie's instructions. Sometimes they needed a bit more time to practice some of the skills, but this didn't seem to interfere with the progress of the class. Besides, sometimes adults need more time, too.

Did the children learn anything from the class? Probably more than we realize because it was a class that exclusively used positive reinforcement methods. Obviously the subtleties of operant and classical conditioning were not entirely absorbed, but certainly they understood the tone. They had the opportunity to see their parents model appropriate ways to interact with other creatures without using force or coercion. We all know that children are little sponges that absorb and reflect back the behaviour they observe modeled by those they look up to. Positive reinforcement training teaches children (and adults) self-control and how to become observant and effective problem solvers. With

this training method, there is little danger of the dog becoming anxious, frightened, or angry. Children learn that they can choose to solve problems with their minds. Those who learn to jerk on a choke chain to communicate with a dog will most likely jerk harder when they don't get the desired results. With positive reinforcement training, the children learn to focus on their own behaviour to communicate more clearly. They learn how to see the situation from a dog's perspective, and empathy is an essential skill for children to have.

Involving children in the training of the family dog also reinforces the dog's position in the pack as lower than the kids, which is especially important in bite prevention and managing status-seeking dogs (dogs with a tendency toward dominant behaviour). When children are given age appropriate dog-related responsibilities, and care is taken to guide the children and ensure everyone's safety, children and dogs can make a great mix.

Xylitol Warning

Xylitol, the low-calorie, "tooth friendly" sweetener found in many products such as chewing gum, baked goods, puddings, energy bars, and even vitamins can be very dangerous to dogs. Dogs that consume high doses of xylitol could quickly develop hypoglycemia or even acute liver failure. Symptoms of xylitol poisoning in dogs include vomiting, lethargy, loss of coordination, collapse, seizures, and in severe cases, liver failure and death. Symptoms can appear as soon as 30 minutes after ingesting toxic amounts of it, so contact a vet immediately if you suspect a dog has ingested xylitol. It is suggested that a dangerous dose of xylitol is more than 0.1 g per kg of body weight, and a very dangerous dose is more than 0.5 g per kg of body weight.

For example, if a 10 kg dog ate one stick of gum that contains 0.17 g of xylitol, it might not be a problem, but if that same dog ate 6 sticks of that gum, he would be in serious danger. (To be safe, contact a vet immediately in any case.) It is

important to note that some brands of gum contain 1 to 2 grams of xylitol per stick, in which case just one piece would be dangerous. For another example of how easily a dog can get poisoned by xylitol, consider a popular brand of sugar free pudding that contains 7g of xylitol per serving: just one spoonful of this pudding could be dangerous for a 10 kg dog.

It can be difficult to determine how much xylitol is in a product because often all sugar alcohols (i.e. sorbitol, mannitol, etc.) are grouped together in the nutritional label, but the only one known to be toxic to dogs is xylitol. In this case, you should be cautious and assume that the grams of sugar alcohol listed on the label are all xylitol.

Again, always contact your vet immediately if you suspect your dog has consumed xylitol. Reports of xylitol poisonings have increased from two in 2002 to nearly two thousand in 2007, so be aware of any products in your home that contain xylitol and keep your dogs far away from them.



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Animal Angels



Buckley is recovering nicely and no longer needs to sleep all day due to the pain. He had his damaged eye removed and the lid sewn shut, and he was also neutered and had his dew claws removed to prevent him from going through another surgery later.

Back in November 2008, a very kind lady from La Ronge helped to rescue a little dog that had been stabbed in the eye with scissors. After the vet examined the dog, it was determined that the wound would not heal on its own and the dog would have to undergo surgery to remove his eye or else be put down. Determined to try to save him, the lady organized a trust fund for Buckley, hoping to raise the \$400 or so while she waited for his swelling to decrease enough for surgery. Surgery was scheduled, and the vet agreed to let Buckley's bill be paid as the money came in.

The kindness and generosity of people should never be underestimated. By the time Buckley went in for surgery in mid December 2008, there was over \$1000 in Buckley's trust fund. However, during the surgery it became obvious that the injury had caused much more damage; the vet

said that most dogs would have died from such a wound. It required major repair and a lot of time, and the bill was looking to be about \$2000 instead of the initial \$400 estimate. But, remember the point about never underestimating the kindness and generosity of people? When it came time to pay the bill, the vet made a deal. The vet and his team were impressed by the people who had contributed money, time, and their home to care for Buckley, so instead of charging for the surgery, they asked that the money go into an account to be used toward supplies for a mass immunization/spay/neuter in La Ronge. There are also plans for others to join in to help promote education in animal care. The lady who organized Buckley's trust fund gave donors the option of getting their money back or leaving it in the fund, and since most of them chose to leave it in the fund, there are plans for the first mass immunization/spay/neuter clinic to occur this spring.

Buckley has been saved and has found a new home. He touched a lot of hearts and his story has inspired a coordinated effort to help ensure all dogs find loving, forever families. Paws up to Buckley and all the angels who helped out!

First Aid Update

Olive



Olive was very patient at the November 2008 Pet First Aid class. For more information on Pet First Aid classes, contact Louise at 781-2774 or visit www.HappyPetBoarding.ca.

Spay It Forward Update

Lilly and Lulu



Meet Lilly and Lulu, two nine-month-old lab crosses that were abandoned at a boarding kennel several months

ago. These energetic and loving littermates are still waiting for adoption, but people have been reluctant to pay for two spays. If you can help cover part of the costs of spays, you would be doing much to increase their chances of finding a forever family. Please email jennifer@oberhund.ca or call 533-1701 if you are interested in helping Lilly and Lulu.

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Toxic Toys?

After all the recent recalls of products made in China, it doesn't seem surprising that tests on pet toys would become a cause for concern. Tests on pet toys have shown that many contain toxins such as lead, chromium, cadmium, arsenic, and mercury.

Experts disagree if the levels of toxins in the pet toys are dangerous. Some insist the levels are dangerously high, especially considering that the toys are licked, chewed, and sometimes ingested. Of particular concern are the toys with water soluble lead (as opposed to solid lead) because it is easily absorbed by the body: by the dogs that lick the toy and the humans who handle the slobbery toy. Other experts disagree, arguing that the levels are low (far below common household materials like latex paint and curtain weights) and do not pose a risk to dogs and cats. Some consider the toys generally safe but "potential hazards," suggesting caution if your pet is chewing or swallowing the toy.

One thing the experts don't dispute is that these toys contain toxins. The question appears to be how much is too much. Apparently, there are no national safety standards for toxins in pet toys (Yikes!), so as a guideline, the industry has been using safety standards for children's toys. However, there are some experts who feel that the current acceptable levels of toxins in children's toys are too high, especially with lead.

It may be some time before the experts sort this out, if they ever do. It might be wise to err on the side of caution and be more discerning with pet toy purchases.

Sources:

Lab Tests Find Lead, Other Toxins in Pet Toys Sold at Wal-Mart by Lisa Wade McCormick; ConsumerAffairs.com; September 16, 2007;
http://www.consumeraffairs.com/news04/2007/09/pet_food_recalls73.html

Tests Find More Toxic Pet Toys by Lisa Wade McCormick; ConsumerAffairs.com; December 28, 2007;
http://www.consumeraffairs.com/news04/2007/12/pet_food_recalls85.html

Toy safety steps back into national spotlight by Liz Szabo, USA Today;
http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2008-03-16-toy-safety_N.htm

Dog Events

** If you have any dog-related events you'd like publicized, please contact Jennifer at 533.1701.*

January 18: Pet Expo at Conexus Arts Centre; 10 am to 5 pm; Tickets are \$5, with proceeds going to the Regina Humane Society. For tickets call 525-9999; for more information visit www.conexusartscentre.ca and click on "events."

January 23 & 24: Pet First Aid Class taught by Louise Yates, Certified Pet First Aid Instructor. The class is held at the Regina Humane Society on Friday, January 23 (6 pm – 9 pm) and Saturday, January 24 (11 am – 7 pm). \$100 Tuition + GST. To register, call the Shelter at 543.6363 ext. 221. For more information call Louise at 781-2774 or visit www.HappyPetBoarding.ca.

February 8: RHS "You've Got a Friend" Telethon from 6:00 pm to 10:00 pm on Access 7. For more information on how you can get involved, call Gail at 543.6363 (ext.229).

Important information for Regina dog owners:

Regina Humane Society

Lost and Found Department: 949-7770;
After hours emergencies 543-6363

Cathy Lauritsen Memorial Off-leash Dog Park

The park is located south of 13th Avenue and west of Lewvan Dr. The creek edge of the park is not fenced, so escape artists will have an opportunity.

Dog Bylaws

Dog related bylaw information can be found at the City of Regina's website (www.regina.ca). Not picking up after your dog: \$100. Letting your dog off leash: \$100. Watching them romp off leash at the dog park (or safely outside City limits): priceless.

We respectfully request that, for their own safety and comfort, you leave your own pets at home for this event.



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