

Making the Holidays Special for Your Rescue Dog

Tis' the season to be jolly! The holiday season is a time for joy, celebration, and gatherings with family and friends, but for rescue dogs, it can also bring new challenges and stress. With all the hustle and bustle, it's essential to keep your dog's well-being in mind. Here are some tips to ensure your rescue dog has a festive and calm holiday experience.

Create a Calm Environment

The busy holiday time can be overwhelming for dogs, especially those who are not used to it and sensitive to loud noises and gatherings. Creating a peaceful atmosphere is key to their comfort.

Safe Space: Designate a quiet room where your dog can retreat when company arrives. This space should be stocked with things that make them feel secure and comfortable – their favorite bed, toys, and a cozy blanket. If possible, get them used to this room before guests arrive, so your dog can acclimate to the situation at their own pace and see it as a safe zone.

Crate Comfort: If your dog is crate-trained, consider setting up their crate in this quiet area away from where the gatherings will be. Make it inviting by adding an interactive toy or a stuffed Kong filled with treats. This will not only provide a comforting space but also keep them occupied while you enjoy your holiday festivities.

Pre-Visit Preparation: Before guests arrive, consider taking your dog for a long walk to help them expend energy. If the weather is too cold, you can do enrichment games or indoor activities. This can reduce anxiety and make them more likely to relax when people start arriving.

Holiday Enrichment Ideas

Keeping your dog's mind engaged is crucial, especially during the holidays when routines can be disrupted.

DIY Puzzles: Create holiday-themed scent games using items from your home. For instance, take 3-5 empty boxes or plastic cups, hide treats in one, and let your dog sniff them out. This not only provides mental stimulation but also encourages your dog to use their natural instincts.

Advent Calendar Fun: Consider getting an advent calendar filled with daily treats or activities for your dog. This can be a fun way for both you and your dog to enjoy the season together, as they will eagerly anticipate each day's surprise.

Scent Work: Get creative with scent work by using an old towel or scarf to roll up treats and loosely tie it. Watch your dog work to figure out how to extract their goodies! This engages their brain and encourages problem-solving.

Festive Training Activities



Incorporating holiday-themed training can make for some memorable moments.

Obedience Games: Teach your dog to fetch or open “gifts.” You can wrap an empty box with treats or a toy and teach them to open it on cue. These playful activities can strengthen your bond and enhance your dog’s skills.

Outdoor Adventures: If your dog enjoys the outdoors, take them on walks to see holiday lights. Use a comfortable harness and leash to help them feel secure while exploring new sights and sounds. Ensure they’re comfortable with any decorations that may be unfamiliar or frightening, like large inflatable characters or bright lights. Maybe do the walk during daylight first and let them sniff and explore the new things.

Photo Opportunities: If your dog is accustomed to wearing sweaters or coats, take the opportunity to capture festive family photos. This not only creates lasting memories but also helps your dog get accustomed to wearing clothing if it’s not already a part of their routine. If they aren’t comfortable with clothing, try a festive bandana or create a holiday theme setting for the photo.

Safe Celebrations

It’s important to include your dog in holiday traditions while ensuring their safety.

Dog-Friendly Treats: Make or buy holiday treats specifically for dogs, ensuring that they do not contain toxic ingredients like chocolate, grapes, or certain nuts. You can get creative and bake your own homemade treats using dog-safe ingredients such as pumpkin or natural peanut butter. Avoid feeding your dog turkey as it has high fat content and can cause an upset stomach.

Safe Decorations: Choose decorations that are safe for pets. Avoid tinsel, as it can be harmful if ingested. Avoid lighting candles, and ensure decorations are placed out of reach and ornaments on a tree placed higher, to prevent accidents.

Guest Awareness: When guests arrive, remind them to respect your dog’s space and boundaries. Encourage your visitors to ignore your dog initially until they feel comfortable approaching. This can help reduce anxiety for your furry friend.

Traveling with Your Dog

For those traveling with their dogs here are some tips to ease the process and avoid stress:

Preparation: If you’re visiting family, aim to make their environment comfortable for your dog. Bring familiar items, such as their bed or favorite toys. This can help create a sense of familiarity in a new setting.

Routine Maintenance: Stick to your dog’s regular schedule if you can. Mirror their home routine by going for their regular walks and maintaining normal feeding times. Incorporate playtime to minimize stress. Consistency is crucial for your dog’s comfort, particularly in a new place.

Car Safety: If you're traveling by car, use a pet seatbelt or crate to keep your dog safe. Plan for regular stops to allow your dog to stretch, relieve themselves, and hydrate.

By focusing on these tips, you can create a holiday season that is enjoyable for both your family and your rescue dog. The goal is that your dog feels comfort, safe and secure during this festive time. Celebrate the holidays with mindfulness, and your rescue dog will appreciate the effort you put in to make the season special.

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