

Training & Behavior Resources



*If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Behavior and Training Department by phone: 410-235-8826 Ext. 151 or by email: trainer@mdspca.org.

Holidays & Dogs

Yes, it is that time of year again—the weather turns colder, the Christmas lights are brought out from storage, and plans are made to spend Thanksgiving at Grandma’s house. As visions of dancing sugar plums and pumpkin pie enter your thoughts, Fido is also daydreaming about that turkey that he is going to pull down from the dining table when no one is looking. Or, he is planning his escape route from your rambunctious, loud, tail-pulling nieces and nephews. Now is the time to start planning if, and how to include Fido in the festivities while keeping him safe and happy.

Before making any plans for Fido, ask yourself, what makes Fido the happiest? Toys? A peanut butter stuffed kong? A marrow bone? Should you let Fido loose during all the festivities? Perhaps Fido is anxious around a lot of people and could use a vacation with a dog sitter or friend.

Above all else, be realistic. You may love spending time with your crazy cousins, but Fido may feel differently. Instead of allowing Fido to roam freely at the party, consider leaving him in a crate or ex-pen in a quiet room. Of course, including a frozen peanut butter kong or marrow bone will keep him busy and satisfied.

If you want to dampen the sounds of the party while making Fido feel more at ease then setup a stereo to play classical music. You can even give his new sanctuary an added calming touch by spraying a bit of Adaptil (Dog Appeasing Pheromone) on his bed. Be sure to check in on Fido throughout the festivities and give him a few holiday snuggles to remind him how much he means to you. When things are not so crazy (i.e. the turkey is being cut and toasts are being made), consider allowing your furry friend out to say “hello.”

For the brave and bold who want to have their cautious dogs be a part of the party I suggest a four-step approach.

- **Go Slow:** Have your dog in another room when guests arrive and wait until everyone is settled and relaxed before beginning any introductions.
- **Watch carefully:** Be a thoughtful observer by watching for subtle signals that tell you Fido is getting stressed or uncomfortable.
- **Manage:** Be your dog’s advocate and intervene in a calm and cheerful way when you see trouble brewing.
- **Take Breaks:** Give your furry friend lots and lots of breaks from the action. Short positive interactions with new people are far better than pushing Fido until he says uncle or decides to take matters into his own hands or paws?

So before embarking on your holiday adventure this year, make a plan for your pooch. Set him up for success. Then sit back and watch as both humans and dogs celebrate and be merry.