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### **Vacation**

I've heard many horror stories lately from clients leaving their dogs with relatives when they went on vacation. Though at first, it may seem your dog would be more relaxed at your brother's home, especially since you visit often, without you; your dog is under a stress level that you may not see.

#### **A Pet Sitter:**

Keeping your dog at home and having a dog walker come in to take care of your dog may not be a great idea either. If your dog walker comes four times per day for a total of ½ hour per session, then your dog is only getting interaction and exercise for 2 hours per day. If you are gone on vacation for one week, that is certainly not enough company for your beloved dog. Though you may think your dog would be more comfortable at home, dogs are pack animals, and the absence of his pack will cause him stress.

#### **Staying at a relative's house:**

Even though your dog may be used to visiting your relative's house, the situation is completely different when you are absent. It is similar to leaving a baby with relatives. The baby loves grandma and grandpa but still cries when you leave him or her with them and go to the movies. Again, it may be a familiar setting for your dog but your dog is under stress without you being there. You are his pack.

#### **The Stress:**

Most dogs chew things when stressed. They may also have accidents but the stress manifests itself mostly with chewing. They chew on laundry, furniture, remotes, telephones and anything else they can get their mouth on. Not eating is another form of stress but obviously not as harmful as chewing. I have heard horror stories of dogs eating socks and chewing up couch pillows, all of which resulted in emergency surgery to remove the blockage.

#### **What to do?**

If you are intent on leaving your pet with a relative, over night stays before your long vacation are imperative. Your dog should spend an evening, and a weekend at his 'vacation home' just so (a) he knows you are coming back for him and (b) he can get into a routine with the people who will be caring for him while you are gone especially since you won't be there for him to rely on.

### **Kenneling:**

I recommend leaving your dog in a kennel, yes it may cost you money but in the long run you will be saving money especially if your dog chews up your sister's oriental rug. Watching someone's dog is a big responsibility, and it may cost you a friendship or strain a family relationship if something goes wrong. Some boarding kennels will take your dog on a walk each day during his stay, this way he isn't cooped up in a dog kennel all day.

Though we do not have a boarding kennel, many of our clients who do day care with us choose to leave their dogs here when they go on vacation; and I'm sure there are many day care centers that do the same. The dogs that stay with us play with the day care dogs for most of the day are trained for about 20 minutes per day and are exhausted by the time bedtime comes at 10 PM after our training classes are done. We advise any new clients that want to leave their dog with us that they leave their dog her for daycare before their trip so they are used to their owners coming back for them.

Yes, kenneling your dog is going to cost you some money, but you cannot put a price tag on piece of mind and knowing your dog is in a safe environment. All kennel staff are trained to know the signs to look for if a dog is sick or not feeling well. In case of an emergency, kennel staff would be able to recognize a situation before it becomes life threatening; your relative may not be able to catch it in time.

Furthermore, many kennels have someone on duty 24 hours a day, checking to make sure everyone is ok. I'm sure a relative will have to leave the house at some point and your dog will be alone. And remember, if you leave your dog at your home and have a dog walker come to your house even four times a day, your dog is alone over night.

### **Conclusion:**

It may seem cost effective or that you are doing your dog a favor, by leaving him with a relative, but more often than not, it is just easier to board your dog with a trained professional. While I'm giving you the worst-case scenario, unfortunately, the worst case only has to happen one time. You don't want to have to replace your sister's couch and what about the stuffing from the sofa, and your dog's health? Your dog probably will need x-rays just to make sure he or she passed the stuffing from the couch or the splinters of wood which he ingested chewing the couch up.

Of course, there are dogs that are fine staying with relatives while you vacation, and some older dogs will not stress at all when left at Mom's; but I would still do some 'dry runs' to be sure your dog and relatives will have a stress free visit.

If you are going to kennel your dog, pick a kennel or day care that you feel comfortable with. Make sure your dog visits the kennel overnight or over a weekend before your vacation, just to make sure he adjusts properly. No dog likes to be away from his pack, but you must do everything in your power to make sure that your dog is safe while you vacation.

### **Beth Bradley**

Beth Bradley began studying animal behavior and dog training at 12 years of age. She became a New Jersey State Animal Control Officer in 1986. Beth graduated Rutgers University with a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and Criminal Justice. Throughout her schooling, Beth worked and studied under many well-renowned animal behaviorists and trainers. Beth formed her own company in 1989 and has made dog training her full time career since 1995. Beth is also a writer for the *Animal Companion*, she has produced CD-ROMs and DVD's on training and is author of a training book titled *Real World Dog Training*.

Beth is a member of the German Shepherd Dog Club of America, the German Shepherd Dog Club of America – Working Dog Association, the United Schutzhund Clubs of America, and she is Secretary and Training Director of the Greater Philadelphia Schutzhund Club. Beth actively competes in both American Kennel Club and Schutzhund Trials both in the United States of America and Europe. Beth is a certified Canine Good Citizen Evaluator for the American Kennel Club. Beth can be contacted via the web at [www.dog-trainer.biz](http://www.dog-trainer.biz) or her business (201) 247-8472.