



Here's some advice to help the holiday season be as fun as it can be, for both you AND your dog!

1. Better safe than sorry. Are kids coming over and you're not 110% sure about how they'll behave around your dog? Then start with your dog safely contained, meet the kids and then decide how they'll interact. Is Uncle George, all 6 foot 7 of him, driving in from out of town to meet your dog who is uncomfortable around unfamiliar men? Begin conditioning your dog to love it when strangers drop by, or find a place your dog will be comfortable (in a crate? at the neighbors?) until you can organize a greeting ceremony in which everyone is happy.

Dog training professionals live by the words "better safe than sorry," and are quick to put their dogs away to avoid problems. That's a better option than crossing one's fingers and saying "I *think* it'll be okay...". Is your dog not comfortable hanging out in a crate or back room? Start now and teach your dogs that it's great to have a private room all to themselves!

2. Keep greetings low key. When it is time to make introductions, do all you can to avoid your dog being overwhelmed by visitors. Ask your guests to stay relatively quiet, to avoid looming over Ginger, or letting a pack of children surround nervous Nellie. You might even give your guests treats to throw on the floor to keep Spot busy vacuuming the floor, instead of jumping up.

3. Observe carefully. Watch interactions like a hawk, looking for signs of stress in your dog. If you see lip licks, a tight, closed mouth, and/or avoidance behavior from your dog, it's your job to protect both your dog and your family. Know your dog's signs of discomfort and minimize the potential of any problems by being proactive rather than reactive. Remind yourself that professional trainers and behaviorists don't hesitate to separate dogs and visitors so that everyone can relax.

4. Give everyone a break. Give Fido a break after an hour or so with the guests; why wait until he's tired and beginning to get grumpy? Many of the cases I've seen in the past have occurred after the dog has been with the company all day long, is tired and finally snaps or bites at the end of the day. Being an introvert (truly), I can sympathize. I love company and being with people, but I get tired after hours of it and need to go to my crate so that I don't get cranky and bite someone. (Please keep that in mind if I come to visit.)

5. Dog sitters, don't leave home without them! Going away yourself instead of welcoming company at your house? Be thoughtful about whether you want to take your dog with you. How fun is it going to be when you discover that your nephew is allergic to dogs, or that your dog has diarrhea on your grandmother's Persian rug?

For everyone's sake, consider leaving your dog at home, either in a trusted kennel or with a great dog sitter. This could be a blessing to your dog, to you, or to the rest of your family. Isn't there enough to deal with over the holidays without worrying about both Bowser and Uncle Harvey's political rantings? (Of course, some families do wonderfully when dogs visit, but if you're not sure, discretion is the better part of valor.)

With those tips in mind, whether you stay home or travel, we wish you and your four-footed family the best of holidays!