

# How to survive Christmas with your dog

**Christmas is a perfect time to get together, have fun, eat lots, binge watch some TV and have a merry time.**

But it can be a stressful time for your dog, during a normal week your dog might spend a lot of time on their own and now the whole family is home so the calm quiet has gone.

Your home all of a sudden is full of shiny baubles and lights, tinsel everywhere you look, heck even the street might look different with house lighting. Visitors are more frequent, you're busy wrapping presents and preparing for Christmas week, its really stressful time, so it's not hard to imagine how easy it is for your dog to get stressed.

A stressed dog could stop listening to you, starting being naughty, go off their food, hide away from you, become ill or they may just act out of character. So this is my Canine Christmas Survival Guide to ensure you and your dog have a stress free festive break.

First Things First – Your Dogs Schedule.

During Christmas week and more importantly Christmas Day try as much as possible to maintain your dogs everyday schedule when it comes to their meals, bedtime and walks etc The familiarity of their usual activities will help stressed dogs cope with all the unusual goings on such as visitors and general excitement of Christmas. By sticking to their schedule within reason you giving them something they can predict ie meal times and that routine feeling will relax them.

## The Day Before

Christmas Eve can be stressful for you as you plan and arrange everything that's needed for Christmas Day. Ensure your dog is on your to do list too, by planning a big walk with them it will help tire them out and hopefully keep them tired for Christmas Day too.

Try taking them away from your usual walking places, somewhere new and less frequently visited will mean lots of interesting smells and sights that will keep your dog's brain active. If you can tire out your dog physically and mentally then you are certain to have one tired dog who is ready to chill.



As the Big Day arrives there are a lot of different things to consider.

## Dog Friendly Visitors

You've gone to the trouble of training your dog to behave nicely and a few days of ignoring your dog rules and letting your dog get away with unwanted behaviour could very well undo

your hard work. Your rules or example could be there's no jumping up, no begging for food, your dog must wait to be invited on the sofa etc. You shouldn't let rules slip away, even when you have visitors around.

Write up a list of things your dog is allowed and not allowed to do, put it where you visitors can see it and make sure they read it when they arrive. If you have, dog friendly family or friends coming around who are likely to allow your dog to jump on them to say hi or beg for food or let your dog get away with being naughty because it's cute!

Show them your list and then show them 'training games' they can play with your dog instead. ie they can give your dog a treat if all their paws stay on the ground while they are saying how. Tell them they can reward your dog if he sits when they ask for a sit or show them a game they can play based around your dog's training.

My favourite game to show is Nose Boops Recall I ask my dog Erick for a nose touch (He will touch my hand with his nose), when he does it I say 'good' and then throw a treat for him to chase and eat. Then I call Erick back and repeat. Visitors will love something like this.

### The Non Dog Visitors.

Yep we all have them Non dog friends and family who don't seem to quite understand our connection with our dog's. For example, my dogs are apart of my family and yes they are allowed on the sofa. As caring dog owners there is a lot we do for our dogs or for the benefit of our dogs that we probably don't even think about. But for our non dog owning friends they might need to be told about the rules to follow in order to keep your dog safe and your visitors happy.

For me this means no leaving food in easy access of my dogs especially toxic items such as chocolate, sweets etc they'd be gobbled in an instant, this means not leaving your plate on

the coffee table or any food placed on the kitchen side should be pushed far away from the edge.

It could mean for you that visitors must ensure the gate is closed when they enter, they should never leave the front door open not even for a minute, while they bring in bags. Or your dog is simply not allowed past the front door unless they have their collar and lead on.

It's also worth ensuring all of your visitors know you have a dog, the last thing you need is to find out the new girlfriend of one of your guests is scared or allergic to dogs. It will cause a lot of stress and your dog may find themselves shut away which isn't fun for them.

### The Dog Visitors

Occasionally the human visitors bring dog visitors too, always try to ensure the dogs have met before or if they haven't met before getting them to meet outside first on neutral ground will help dispel any tension. Keep the visiting dog on their lead and show them around the areas they are allowed to be.

Once inside allow the dogs to interact, hopefully settle down. If they want to play let them within reason ie don't allow their play to become too excited, intervene and play some calming training games.

A favourite calming game of mine is to scatter some treats in the grass and encourage each dog to find them, the sniffing will relax them as well as tiring them out. Or if you don't have a garden area get a cardboard box for each dog fold the flaps down and scatter a few treats in each, then get each dog sniff out the treats.

Let each dog have their own space to chill out in, your dog will have their usual bed and the guest dog should have set space that isn't too close to your dog. This will allow each dog the opportunity to relax in their own space.

## Their Own Space

All the excitement of Christmas can be overwhelming even for us humans, cooped up in small spaces all day together. Just we feel the need to go away for a short amount of time to decompress and our dogs also feel the same. Make sure they always have access to their bed or a quiet room/area where they can take themselves away to sleep and enjoy some peace.

Remember you can always go for a walk with dog you'll get fresh air and so will your dog which helps relax you both.

## Dinner Is Served

When you all having your Christmas Lunch, it's usually a good idea to keep your dog out of the way, so they aren't under foot, begging or able to get any dropped food. You could put them in the next room blocked with a baby gate so they can still see what's happening.

My top tip would be to give them a fun interactive food toys such as a Kong Classic, Lick Mat or Kong Treat Ball. These toys provide your dog something to do that is satisfying, rewarding and fun, it will make them forget all about your Christmas Lunch.

My toy of choice is the Kong Classic filled with lots of nice doggy treats even a bit of the christmas lunch such as the meat, gravy and veg. That way they are getting some of the lovely smells of our lunch but in their own safeway.

## Don't Forget About You

Just remember to have a time out for yourself during the festive planning and excitement. The more you can chill out the more your dog will too. There is nothing more relaxing for me then having Erick on my knee for a cuddle with a brew in hand.

I hope you all have a fab Christmas and New year, maybe I'll

see you in the new year for dog training.

Suzanne Gould, Chief Canine Happiness Officer

[www.edinburghholisticdogs.co.uk](http://www.edinburghholisticdogs.co.uk)