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Urban Dog Etiquette



How to properly promenade your pooch in public

City-dwelling dogkeepers are faced with greater challenges than their suburban and rural counterparts. Without a large, fenced yard for exercise, the city dweller must take to the streets three or more times a day with Fido or Fifi in tow. Crowded sidewalks replete with joggers, construction scaffolding and double-wide strollers turn each outing into an obstacle course. The following tips will make walks safer and more enjoyable for you, your dog and your neighbors.

It's the Law

Most cities and counties have some form of leash, license and pick-up-after-your-dog laws. These ordinances are designed to protect both the dog and the community at large. When leashed, a dog is safe from traffic and unable to follow his instincts to chase children, investigate garbage cans or dig up landscaping. Whether a dog is friendly or aggressive, a leash keeps him in check and allows the public to pass undisturbed. Some communities have leash-length restrictions. Whether it's the law or not, keep leashes to six feet or less on public sidewalks. Retractable leashes should not be used in areas frequented by joggers, skaters or cyclists; the thin line blends into the background and, all too often, athlete and dog collide.

Licensing a dog enables an animal control agency to return a lost pet to his rightful owner. Also, licensing fees often support local animal control efforts. In addition, the number of licenses issued gives government officials an idea of how many dogs are in the community, statistics that are very helpful when planning dog runs, shelter expansions and the like.

Pooper-scooper laws are essential for both the health and beautification of the community. Canine diseases and parasites are often shed in feces, which puts other dogs and children at risk. And no one enjoys maneuvering through unsightly piles of dog waste when out for a stroll. Pick up feces using a plastic bag, and knot the top to control odor and flies before disposing of it in a waste receptacle. Train your dog to urinate in gutters or on nonliving vertical surfaces, such as lampposts or hydrants. Avoid trees and flowerbeds.

Etiquette Lessons and Safety Tips

The well-trained city dog needs to respond to a minimum of four basic commands: “Sit-Stay,” “Heel,” “Leave it” and “Come.” When you’re waiting at a traffic light, a dog in a sitstay is out of harm’s way. And while walking nicely on a loose leash is enough for most forays, there are times when your dog will need to be at heel position, which keeps her under control at your side.

The command “Leave it” is employed when it is necessary for Fido to avert his gaze. Whether he’s being tantalized by chicken bones or a jogger, getting your dog to break eye contact with “forbidden fruit” before he acts enables you to draw his attention to safer rewards and pursuits. Or, should the dog slip his collar or break his leash, a recall command (“Come”) could save his life. Most, if not all, of these commands are taught in basic obedience/manners class. Contact your local shelter for a referral to a class near you.

Remember that dogs can be frightened by sudden loud noises, such as running children, motorcycles, skateboarders and in-line skaters, to name a few. Be aware that such situations may demand quick and complete control on your part to prevent your dog from lunging or biting.

Before leaving home to run errands with your dog by your side, take a moment to consider which places permit dogs and which do not. For your pet’s safety, leave him at home when he is not allowed to go into an establishment with you. A dog left tied to a post or parking meter is an easy target for teasing or theft.

Remember the Good Neighbor Policy

Keep in mind that not everyone loves dogs, so it’s up to the urban dogkeeper to present a dog who is well-socialized and under control. When riding in an elevator, sit your dog in a far corner to avoid door-dashing each time the elevator makes a stop. Do not allow Fido to jump up on other riders, even when the greeting is friendly. Hurry through lobbies or take freight elevators and back exits if the building rules mandate it. Never allow your dog to soil in front of the building’s entrance. If you have a young pup or dog-in-training who can’t control himself, be sure to carry paper towels and odor neutralizer.

Many dogs enjoy the company of other canines, but always ask before allowing your animal to launch himself at another dog—for both their sakes. The same is true regarding children. First ask the child or her parent, “May my dog say hello to you?” before allowing physical contact. The greeting should not include jumping, bouncing off or grabbing at the child—even if it is done in the spirit of friendliness. If your dog is physically challenging, consider using a head halter for better control.

When we choose to keep dogs in crowded urban areas, we take on additional responsibilities. Unfortunately, when little consideration is shown for the neighbors, more doors close to dogkeepers. On the other hand, with a little training and thoughtfulness, more businesses and public areas will begin to put out the welcome mat for both you and your dog.

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