



ANIMAL CRACKERS

Hard to believe but the summer is coming to a close. Summer vacations are over and before you know it our children will be immersed in homework and afterschool activities. As difficult as it may seem to get everything done during the summer months this just gets compounded when the fall arrives.

Scheduling changes in even the most organized families has an adjustment period. It takes a bit of time before things are running smoothly again.

Unfortunately, most families are unaware of the impact that this change in schedule has on their beloved pets. Our pets have become accustomed to the hustle and bustle of daily life around the house. All of a sudden, without any warning for them, the entire family leaves early not to return home until mid-afternoon sometimes early evening. Suddenly the amount of time our pets are left alone dramatically increases.

It is not uncommon that come mid-September I get calls from individuals describing behavioral challenges with their dogs and cats that were non-existent in the summer. Poor potty habits, destructive behaviors, nuisance barking and digging are just a sampling of the naughty behaviors that can crop up.

A little bit of pre-planning for this seasonal change can help circumvent many of these challenges. Many of the negative changes that one might see in their pets are actually their way to tell you that they are bored. It is essential to keep your animals well-exercised and mentally stimulated so these undesirable behaviors don't crop up.

As part of the new morning routine should be time for your dog to have a long brisk walk and play session. Tired dogs are good dogs. While it may be difficult to provide your dog with quality time early in the morning, doing so will make it much easier for your dog to relax while the house is quiet.

Come up with some creative ways to keep your animals entertained while they are

left alone. Hide a couple of biscuits throughout the house in unexpected areas for Fido to discover during the day. Take a trip to your local pet store and take a look at some of the various interactive toys on the market that will help keep your four-legged friends entertained. There are devices that dispense treats as well as visually stimulating toys for dogs and cats that will provide lots of entertainment in your absence.

Set aside time to ensure that litter boxes are properly maintained. Cats by nature are fastidious creatures. If you forget about their litter box, they will start forgetting about it as well. This can turn out to be a most unpleasant situation for all. A few cardboard boxes placed throughout the house will turn out to be fun little playhouses for kitty. Adding a good scratching post to your home will help keep your furniture in its original condition.

When the family does arrive home from work or school, make sure that the pets are part of the routine. A long walk and a great game of Frisbee with Fido or special cuddle time with the kitty will be good not only for the animal but will help wash away the stress of the day for the family members as well.

Is your schedule so tight that fitting in your pet care responsibilities is impossible? There is still a good answer, hire a professional pet sitting service. Services such as PetMinders, Inc. offers can be provided at appropriate times during the day to make sure your furry friends continue to lead happy healthy lives. Services can include feeding and exercising your animals and caring for litter boxes. If necessary, medications can also be administered.

Providing proper care for your animals will in many cases eliminate the possibility of many unwanted behaviors from ever cropping up.

Have fun with your animals. They are counting on you to provide them with a safe, loving, nurturing environment.



Mary Lou Hanlon is a longtime resident of Warren and is the owner of PetMinders, Inc, The Kennel Alternative. PetMinders has been providing professional pet sitting and dog training lessons in the privacy of clients homes for over 15 years. Mary Lou is one of the nation's top dog agility competitors. She has competed both nationally and internationally and has received numerous awards in both dog obedience as well as agility. She can be reached at 908-755-PETS(7387) or via email at petmindersinc@yahoo.com.