



Welcome to
Boredom Busters Pet Care Services
Winter Newsletter
07726 265848 Brentwood

News from the Team



I have now completed my First Aid for Dogs course. This is about providing temporary measures to help any dog in an emergency, not to replace a visit to the vet. I have updated my first aid kit, which is always in the van, and intend this to be the one item of canine equipment I never need to use!

My dog Fred passed his Silver Kennel Club Good Citizen Award (<http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/dogtraining>) in October. This is a scheme I highly recommend, is available for puppies as well as adult dogs and if you are looking for something to do with your dog this is not only a good scheme, but fun as well. There are four levels, Puppy Foundation, Bronze, Silver and Gold. Look out for Fred in an upcoming issue of the Brentwood Gazette.

Winter Care for Dogs

Young, elderly, ill or infirm dogs may need a coat when out of doors this winter. Wind can be particularly chilling. Dogs with short coats living in centrally heated homes don't grow a winter coat in the same way an outdoor dog would. If you turn your heating off at night, consider whether your dog might be cold, even indoors and think about getting a separate coat for night times.

Dogs don't usually need more food in the winter unless they are kept out of doors, so don't be tempted to give extra food. Outdoor water bowls can ice over, and very cold water is not good for dogs. There is a danger of ice burns to the tongue if the bowl is metal and cold enough, or a ceramic bowl can crack. Float a ball in the water to help prevent icing over, bring the bowl in, or empty it on very cold nights.

It can be just as dangerous to leave a dog in a cold car as a hot one – make sure your dog is warm enough if you have to leave them for a short while.

Ice and Snow

Essex isn't known for its heavy snow fall, but ice and hail usually lead to gritting lorries. The salt and other materials can irritate your dogs feet, so you may need to give them a wipe over when returning from a walk; try not to let your dogs lick their feet in case they ingest something that could make them ill.

Snow and fur is not a good mix, and sometimes snow balls form on long haired dogs. Even shorter haired breeds can gather these on their feet, and once they have formed they need to be left to melt. They are very painful for your dog to walk on, so if you spot them, take the dog home for a break.

If we do get heavy snowfall this season, watch out for snow on buildings or trees that might melt and fall – just as your dog is underneath. Check that the height of the snow in the garden doesn't open up an escape route for your dog.

Anti-freeze

Dogs, but in particular cats, have a great liking for anti-freeze due to its sweet taste. Keep it well away from your pets because it can be fatal.

Christmas

Chocolate and mistletoe are more in evidence at Christmas. Chocolate is toxic to dogs, although they may be able to tolerate a small amount of milk chocolate. Call the vet if you suspect they have been in the Quality Streets – cooking chocolate is much worse, so watch out when chocolate cakes are around. Mistletoe, and in particular the berries, are highly toxic, so make sure they are hung up carefully and can't be pulled down by the dogs. Watch out for fallen berries.

Understanding Your Dog

Dogs can't speak, but that doesn't mean that they don't communicate. As a pack animal, in the wild they depend on communicating with the rest of their pack for survival.

Your Dog's Mind

Dogs are single- and simple-minded creatures. This doesn't mean that they are stupid, they are often highly intelligent, but they can usually only concentrate on one thing at a time - even if it looks as if they are doing more than one thing at once - they aren't. They also live in the present and don't understand the past. If they make a mess while you are out of the room, then they won't understand what you're shouting about if you come in even ten minutes later. They will genuinely have no idea what the fuss is about *even if you take them to the mess and show them*. This goes for chewing up the wrong thing, knocking the bin over and spreading the mess around or emptying their bladder or bowels in the house. They just won't associate your bad temper *now* with something they've done and forgotten about. It's a waste of your time unless you catch them in the act, and even then shouting doesn't help. You might think that they look guilty, but that's us misinterpreting submissive behaviour.

If your dog is looking at something - he's thinking about it. So if he's looking at the rubbish bin, he's thinking that there is something that smells tasty in there and might just stick his nose in if he can get away with it. If he's looking at the door to the outside, he's thinking that he'd like to go outside. We can use these simple thought processes to read his body language, which will help us to encourage the behaviour we want, and discourage the behaviour we don't.

Your Dog's Behaviour

The first thing you need, to learn to understand your dog, is time with your dog. So spend time with him, and watch him. You also need to understand that your dog is a pack animal, he's a social creature and if all he has for his pack is *you*, then he'll act with you as he would with a pack of other dogs.

As he is a social creature, much of what he does is done with the idea of attention, or touch, in his mind. He wants to be with his pack, and he wants to know that his pack knows he is there.

His Bark is Worse Than his Bite

There is a lot of truth in this saying. Barking dogs don't often bite - it's the silent ones you have to be wary of. In the wild there's no point barking to announce you're about to bite, as all the prey would have run away. In the home, dogs bark to scare people away, or to announce the presence of an intruder into their den - the family home. If they begin to feel threatened, they may start to growl. It's quieter than a bark, and reserved for people who are close enough to hear it. If that doesn't work, they'll curl their lips and snarl - this shows their teeth and demonstrates their ability to back up their defences if necessary. If it still doesn't work they'll fall silent, and attack. Always take notice of a dog who stops barking and starts to growl, because he's trying to tell you something important.

The Play Bow

A dog who puts his front feet on the floor, and then reverses his back feet so that his front legs are stretched out in front of him and his bottom is still stuck in the air wants to play. Sometimes they do this as a stretch when they get out of bed, in which case it will be a slow movement, rather than a quick one. Usually they are play bowing to you, or someone else, as an invitation to play. Try going up to your dog and move into this posture yourself. They often recognise it, even from a human and will get very excited. Don't do it if you don't want to play though, that's not fair on the dog.

Tips and Tricks

If your dog is fascinated by your groin area, or worse, that of visitors, it's because you aren't carrying enough interesting smells on your clothes and shoes to interest him. Therefore he's concentrating his attention on the one thing that *will* hold information for him. Because that's what he's sniffing for, information. If you want to stop this behaviour, make sure that you pick up some nice smells for him when you're out, or keep an item aside that you can use to distract him from this perfectly normal doggy habit that is so embarrassing for humans.

When your dog meets other dogs, they don't shake hands. They sniff the undercarriage, then the rear end, and then face to face as long as they aren't restrained. Humans often think this is terrible and are so embarrassed that they won't let their dog do it. This is a mistake, as the dog picks up on the owner's concerns and, being a simple-minded soul, misinterprets them as a danger signal. Because he can't inspect the dog closely himself he trusts his owner and treats the dog as a threat. If it keeps happening, the dog will keep thinking that other dogs are a threat until eventually he'll immediately treat all other dogs as a threat and will become thoroughly anti-social. And all to save one human's embarrassment. *Let your dog sniff.*

Because dogs communicate by body language, they find it much easier to learn commands if they are not spoken. Gestures and movements are much easier for them to learn, but because it is not always easy for humans to get a dog's attention if the dog is not looking at them to see a gesture, then a combination of the two works well for members of both species. Not everyone understands this, so onlookers can be very impressed with your dog obeying movements or gestures. They think the dog is very clever, when in fact, it's the opposite way around.

Give your dog the correct amount of exercise for its breed. A small dog bred for show will need less walking than a small dog bred for digging rats out of holes. A Greyhound is bred for speed, not stamina, so won't need as much exercise as a Dalmatian which is bred to run alongside carriages and so has plenty of stamina. Correctly exercising your dog will make him happier, and you happier as he's too tired to chew, bark, dig, chase or pester you for food or attention.