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100% Effective Natural Hormone Treatment
Menopause, Andropause And Other Hormone Imbalances
Impair Healthy Healing In People Over The Age Of 30!

A Meaningful Activity for You & Your Animal Companion

By Susan Dunn

A Meaningful Activity for You & Your Animal Companion by Susan Dunn, MA, The EQ

Coach™

Whether "you" means you-on-your-own, you and your partner, you and your friend, or you and the kids, the increasing understanding of the healing power of dogs (and other animal companions) offers a unique opportunity for an enriching activity.

While I'll use dogs here, other animal companions have participated in these Visiting and Therapy Programs, such as cats, guinea pigs, birds and rabbits.

Known by various terms, taking your animal companion to a hospital, prison, nursing home, children's shelter, oncology or pediatric ward can be a rewarding experience for everyone.

It gives you and your loved ones a bonding and learning experience, gives your people-loving dog an adventure, and brings great joy and comfort to the people visited.

Visiting a nursing home means giving the residents something to look forward to, and it's easy to make friends around a dog. There's a natural topic of conversation as the dog is busy doing its thing. Whereas simply visiting a rehab center or children's shelter might be a bit awkward, bring your animal companion and everyone feels at home right away.

It's a relief from boring routines to the residents, and a distraction from pain, illness, depression, and homesickness. Caregivers report that residents become more active when a dog comes visiting, and talk about it long afterward. It's a big event to them, and only requires time from you.

A dog can sometimes reach someone who's withdrawn from the world, as letters to pet therapy sites attest. They also have been shown to reduce the blood pressure of people in many different circumstances (apparently always) – healthy college students, a child reading a book alone in a room, and hospitalized elderly. Touching and massaging have been shown to help both the recipient and the giver, as does petting an animal.

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Sounds like a wonderful idea doesn't it, for a winter Sunday afternoon? So how do you proceed?

1. Consider your dog's personality.

You already have a good idea how your dog interacts with other animals and people. Good visiting dogs enjoy meeting strangers, actively approaching but in a calm, friendly manner. A fearful or aggressive dog is not a good candidate. An overly enthusiastic greeter can be trained.

2. Consider your dog's reactions.

He must be able to tolerate strange people, noises and surroundings, commotions, and also the other animals that might be visiting as well. He must be able to calm quickly and reliably.

3. Choose the right venue to suit your dog's personality.

A convalescent home, the children's playground at a shelter, a prison, and a psychiatric ward all require slightly different tolerances from the dog. One dog may be sad at the lack of contact in a convalescent home, while another might be over-stimulated by a group of active children.

4. Start with good obedience training.

Check with your vet or in the yellow pages for training opportunities in your community.

5. Condition your dog to stimulating new environments, building her trust and confidence in you. (If you're taking her there, it's okay.)

6. Read some books on the subject. There's a list here: <http://www.dog-play.com/books.html> .

7. Join an organization that can help you learn and also direct you to opportunities.

The Bright & Beautiful Therapy Dogs, Inc., <http://www.pet-therapist.com> , Therapy Dogs International, Inc., <http://www.tdi-dog.org> , and Delta Society, <http://deltasociety.org> .

8. Obtain a Canine Good Citizenship Certificate, awarded under guidelines by the American Kennel Club (AKC).

It involves basic good behavior, following some commands, being able to stay alone briefly, not whine or bark, good grooming, and other things. You can read about it here:

<http://www.akc.org/love/cgc/program.cfm> .

9. Once your dog has earned the Canine Good Citizenship Certificate, you can register him or her in the Canine Good Citizen Hall of Fame:

http://home.earthlink.net/~diane bassett/dogtraining/CGC_hall_of_fame.html .

10. Don't be afraid to set this up on an informal basis, from simply going to visit a home-bound

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neighbor, to calling the volunteer director at the local children's shelter and asking if you can come by.

A good volunteer director is adept at working in various volunteer opportunities, and also always looking for enriching, fun and/or educational activities for clients.

Your visitation may be highly structured or not, involve one-on-one or group, you may visit residents' rooms or meet in the meeting room, and yours may be the only animal there or one of many.

You can see the various possibilities this can provide for a meaningful family or individual experience. There are both intellectual and emotional learning opportunities. With the right animal companion, you're on your way and someone's going to be very happy to see you!

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Beware: Easter Can Be Fatal to Your Animal Companion

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Things change when holidays come around, and Easter is no exception. New people come to your house with strange things, routines change, you get more tired, and pay less attention, and your animal companion may be exposed to a wider age range of people companions.

All these things can confuse your animal companion causing them to do things they ordinarily wouldn't do, and also bring harm to themselves.

Since it has been my fate to learn from experience, sometimes vicariously, sometimes straight-on, I'll include examples which I hope this article will keep you from having to experience.

1.Keep careful track of visitors' possessions.

People bring all sorts of things in their suitcases and purses, like nitroglycerine and sleeping pills. Keep purses and luggage up off the floor, and in the case of cats, closed and latched.

Or you'll end up at the vet's, as I did one year, when Thisbe smelled chocolate (Ex Lax) in my mother's suitcase and ingested enough to kill her, said the vet, who was surprised she survived.

2.Pay close attention to the Easter candy and other gifts.

CHOCOLATE IS A SPECIAL DANGER. IT CONTAINS THEOBROMINE WHICH IS POISONOUS TO ANIMALS.

People wrap food dogs can smell that you can't, but then again it doesn't have to be food. Chucky tore open packages of bath powder, perfume and bath salts as well. If you catch Fido nosing around, remove the package to somewhere safe.

3. Keep your animal companion on their regular regime and diet.

Don't, like me, carve the lamb roast tossing the fat down to Shy Nell, then carry it in to the table, begin the feast, and have Shy Nell enter the dining room and proceed to vomit it all up, sending one of your guests to the restroom. Try working that into the dinner table conversation!

4. Protect your animal companion from new people and vice versa.

Guests can agitate and excite your pet so they get in trouble, do bizarre things, and also harm people.

There are people like me who don't know what they're doing, stick their hand in the bird cage to acquaint themselves with your Macaw, and ... "the Macaw uses its bill to score and then, in steel-cutter fashion, shear the nuts in two so cleanly that the cut surfaces resemble the work of a metal-cutting saw or laser ..." and it's ho-ho-ho, off to the emergency room we go.

5. Don't let your pet eat all gifts that are presented!

The houseguest from hell, I brought homemade dog biscuits for my relative's Labs, which they duly ate ... and we were all up all night as the dogs struggled with fulminating diarrhea.

6. If your animal is excitable, soothe him or her, or remove them if necessary, giving them a special place in the house where they can have quiet time.

7. Protect your animal from young children.

They can poke eyes, pull ears, plop down on stomachs, beat their backs with toys, and generally provoke the gentlest of dogs.

8. Guard against escapes!

Weejums who lived with us for a while, was always looking for his chance to escape, and the holidays were the most exciting time of the year for the little rascal. Oh the opportunities! If you have such a knave in your house, make sure they have their tags, and explain to the kids and to houseguests, to please take care about the front door.

9. Talk to your houseguests, who are more under your "control," and keep your eye out for your other guests.

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Or your pet companion may end up with an injured tail and bad memories like Muff Tuff, who was sleeping near the rocking chair; or a temporarily injured paw like Stan—the—Man, who got stepped on by someone wearing bifocals.

10. Talk to your animal companion - with soothing tones when needed, but also clear commands, so they know the rules still apply.

Use visual "communication" as well, as your animal companion is deeply attuned to you.

BOTTOM LINE: You're busier and preoccupied, things change, it's a good time to stop and think, for the safety of your animal companion. They're counting on you!

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