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For Pet Parents and Pet Professionals

Animal Behavior Associates Newsletter

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Dear Suzanne,

Happy Holidays and Seasons Greetings to you! We can't believe another year is drawing to a close. We wish all of you the very best in 2006. Look for an end of the year gift offer that will arrive in your inbox soon as a special "thank you" from us for our ezine subscribers. Also, check our website on Friday, December 16th for new telecourse dates.

Best,
Suzanne and Dan

- Cat Piece:
Helping Cats Co-Exist

Dog Piece:

Getting a Puppy for the Holidays

Getting your child or loved one a pet as a holiday gift is a popular tradition. However, it isn't usually a good idea. Many times a holiday pet is an "impulse



We recently spoke with a very nice woman and obviously caring cat owner who shares her home with 11 cats. The youngest and newest addition

buy" – a cute puppy in the pet store window or kitten in the shelter that catches your eye. That cute puppy or kitten can create problems if you haven't done your homework and chosen a pet that will fit your lifestyle and that has behavioral characteristics you can live with.

Giving a pet as a surprise gift can backfire. The new owners may not want that particular type of pet or they may not be prepared for the responsibilities of a pet. The consequences can be disastrous. The pet can lose her home and the family can feel guilty and sad.

The increased activities and stresses of the holiday season can make it difficult for people to give the new pet all the time, attention and training she needs. House training, basic manners, what's appropriate as a toy and what isn't take time and effort to teach. Both are hard to find during the holidays. New pets themselves may become stressed trying to cope with the holiday activities.

An alternative idea was the subject of a news article on the American Kennel Club website. Entitled "[A Puppy For Christmas? Hold Off On That Hound!](#)", the article suggested a substitute present such as the "My First AKC Puppy Kit." Designed for children from 3 - 6 years of age, the kit helps kids learn about responsible pet ownership while counting down the days to acquiring their new puppy. The kit includes several presents, including a leash, food bowl, training book and plush toy dog that can be opened over a several days. This gives parents a chance to teach the child how to responsibly care for a pet.

This idea need not be limited to puppies or to children. Anyone thinking about getting any new pet over the holidays can be given pet related gifts instead, to help them decide if the pet is a good choice for them. For

to the house, a year old neutered male, was not using the litterbox reliably. The youngster seemed to get along quite well with all the other cats, sleeping near them and playing with them from time to time. Because there seemed to be no overt social conflict among the cats, the cats' owner didn't think the number of cats in the house would be influencing the youngster's housesoiling.

In one of the few studies of indoor cats, Dr. Penny Bernstein calculated the density of an indoor family of 14 cats in a 1340 square foot house. This translates to a little over 0.01 cats/square foot of living space. Densities of free ranging cats vary tremendously, depending on whether they depend on widely dispersed prey for food, or have a rich, single location food source such as a landfill or a feeding station replenished by human caretakers. In the latter case (rich food source), densities can be 250 cats/square mile and above, and in the former (dispersed food source) densities average 13 cats/square mile or less. Calculated on a square mile basis, the indoor density in Dr. Bernstein's study would be an astounding 282,500 cats/square mile.

So, it's not surprising that such high indoor densities could influence many aspects of cat behavior, including elimination habits, even without overt social conflict. Important factors to consider in creating a quality environment for cats at high densities are to (1) provide multiple locations for important resources, (2) make use of vertical space to facilitate social distance, and (3) provide plenty of hiding places for the same reason.

If you have multiple litterboxes, but they are in one location, lined up close to one another, for your cats, this may translate into only one litterbox. Disperse your litterboxes into different areas of your home, while still balancing accessibility and privacy for your cats. Do the same for food, water, resting places and toys.

Any cat owner knows how cats enjoy perching in high places. Making use of vertical space with cat condos, window perches or even a small bed

example, a book that describes the breeds of dogs will help people decide what the right dog is for them. Books like "The Perfect Puppy" by Hart and Hart and "The Right Dog For You" by Tortora are good examples. Good training books such as our "[Raising a Behaviorally Healthy Puppy](#)," "[What Dogs Need and How They Think](#)" and "[76 Ways to Get Your Dog to Do What You Want](#)" can help people prepare for a new dog and even decide if a dog is the right pet for them. The prospective new owner can be given a gift certificate to attend a pet parenting class offered by many shelters, trainers and veterinarians or for a puppy or beginning training class.

The same idea can be applied to other kinds of pets, from cats to parrots to hamsters. Books describing their care can be found at many pet stores and bookstores. Many books about dogs and cats can be found at the [DogWise website](#). Of course our books are available at [our website](#).

December Special



Puppy Package*Save Over 20%!

Package Includes:

- Raising a Behaviorally Healthy Puppy
- What Dogs Need And How They Think
- 76 Ways To Get Your Dog To Do What You Want

[More Info](#)

on top of the refrigerator or kitchen cabinet, increases the functional size of your space. The more cats can avoid each other when the need arises, the less likelihood for threats and aggression. Hiding places serve the same function. Ideally, it would be wonderful if only certain cats could occupy certain areas. For example, I suggested that our caring cat owner install a magnetic, or [infra-red locking cat door](#) in one of the bedroom doors. The male youngster will wear a collar that neutralizes the locking signal, allowing him, and only him, to enter the bedroom. His litterbox can be relocated there, creating his own private elimination place.

For the multiple cat family, we recommend our [Helping Cats Co-Exist](#) program, in either computer or audio CD format. The perfect holiday gift for a cat loving friend.

- **Our Piece:**
Making behavior modification work

How to Get Behavior to Change

Recently we received an email from a client wanting to know how to keep her dog from "counter surfing" – stealing things off the counters. Jan said "He'll do it right in front of us! How do I get him to stop?" We recently discussed dogs stealing things (October, 2005 newsletter "Deal'n with Steal'n") and won't repeat the advice here. It did remind us that changing behavior isn't always easy. It can be time consuming and take a lot of work. A colleague, Dr. Rhea Dodd, once developed a handout for clients to help them understand what it takes to change behavior. Below we give you some of Dr. Dodd's principles as well as some of our own.



- Realize that animals don't do things out of spite, for revenge or just to make your life miserable. They do what works – that is,

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- what gets them rewards or allows them to escape or avoid bad things.
- Behavior that is rewarded increases, behavior that is punished decreases.
 - Timing is everything. Rewards or punishers must be delivered immediately after the animal starts the behavior. A delay of even a few seconds will make it difficult for your pet to learn.
 - Rewards and punishments must be given every time the behavior occurs for quite a while for the animal to learn.
 - To change behavior you have to be patient and persistent. Change will not happen over night. The more you work the quicker the change.
 - Make it easy for your pet to do the right thing. Arrange the learning environment so that the behavior you want is easily produced.
 - Any time you try to change behavior, always start with the easiest and simplest thing for your pet to do and then gradually make it more difficult and complex.
 - Always work slowly and use tiny steps. It is better to go too slow than to go too quickly.

To learn more about how pets learn, sign up for our [Fundamentals of Animal Learning Telecourse](#) beginning in January. A new [Fundamentals of Canine Ethology](#) begins in January as well. Dates will be posted on our website by Friday, December 16th.

• **What's New:** **Coral's Health Score!**

Our biggest news this month is our Coral's health scare. Long-time readers know our year and a half old Irish setter puppy is quite a princess.

We became quite concerned when Coral's appetite decreased and she was vomiting frequently. After multiple tests, she was diagnosed with a congenital hole in her diaphragm, which had allowed her internal



organs, including her liver and stomach, to slide into her chest cavity near her heart. To make a long, and frightening story short, after major surgery on November 17th to repair the hole and reposition her organs, Coral is now doing fine, with a prognosis for a normal life and a normal life span. We put together a narrated [video/slide show](#) about Coral's ordeal if you'd like to see her at different stages in her treatment and recovery. We'll be using this innovative process that allowed us to create this video to produce exciting new products and services for you in the coming year. Stay tuned!! (Note: The video is best viewed with broadband or cable connection. If you are on a dial-up connection, or have Windows 98 or earlier, allow considerable time for the video to pre-load before clicking play). The show will play on Macs as well.

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