

INTERGENERATIONAL ACTIVITIES BENEFICIAL TO DOGS AND HUMANS!

By Maureen Ross, MA



I came across the following writing while purging my files, most of which I decided to keep. This particular sharing comes from a July 2004 issue of *Counseling Today*. My addition is adding dogs, of course.

Little Boy and the Old Man By Shel Silverstein

Said the little boy, "Sometimes I drop my spoon,"
Said the old man, "I do too!"
The little boy whispered, "I wet my pants."
"I do that too," laughed the old man.
Said the little boy, "I often cry".
The old man nodded, "So do I."
"But worst of all," said the little boy,
"It seems like grown-ups don't pay attention to me."
And he felt the warmth of the wrinkled old hand.
"I know what you mean," said the old man.

Re-read the above keeping the older adult for the human part and substituting "little boy" responses with what a puppy might say if they spoke "human". Example: Change "I wet my pants" or "I cry" to a dog's innocent plea, "I peed in my crate", "I whine or bark" or "I was so lonely and happy to see you when you got home that I couldn't wait and re-christened the carpet."

One of the emotional human dilemmas I come across in private coaching and on pet partner visits is meeting loving, caring people looking for solutions to:

1. leaving their puppies (or dogs) alone for more than few hours or
2. what to do with a pet when a friend or relative can no longer care for them

Often, I am asked to give my opinion on whether or not it is okay to leave a dog in a crate all day. Should pets who aren't Pet Partners be brought in for visits (if allowed by a facility)? Should a pet be given away if they've lived with someone for 10 years and now the owner is not capable of caring for them?

I don't walk in anyone's moccasins but my own, but my inner wisdom knows that there although these are two distinct issues, they have similar solutions / alternatives.

Everyone has different lifestyle needs. Careful thought and planning should go into any decision to add a puppy or dog to a family. Puppies need to eliminate at least every 2-hours. Many will hold it for much longer in a crate, but it is not healthy (or fair) for them. Puppies need socialization. Adult dogs do too unless they have been conditioned, slowly, to being left alone for longer periods.

Older and adopted dogs need time to transition into new situations. That said, if a loved needs to relinquish a pet due to transition or illness, friends, families and staff need to consider the both the human and the pet. It is almost unbearable for families to make decisions about giving up a pet because no-one in the family wants to take it.

A Thoughtful Alternative – Intergenerational Programs

Today, some of the interaction between generations is decreasing because individuals are relocating around the country for a better whatever. Quality time between the older and younger generation is valuable to pass on wisdom and traditions. The positive emotional benefits of being around older adults

are invaluable. The role-modeling of mixing teenagers with older adults and/or those in need (hospitals, assisted living) is an invaluable lesson in humanity.

Intergenerational programs are growing nation-wide. The National Council on Aging defines "intergenerational programs" as "activities or programs that increase cooperation, interaction or exchange between any two generations. They involve the sharing of skills, knowledge, or experience between old and young." In some cultures, they are revered. Older adults get to use their skills, meet people and continue to achieve a sense of fulfillment. They get to spend "quality" time teaching someone (or a dog). Consider this!

If you are aware that you or someone you know will need assistance for a puppy, adult dog, adopted dog or aging dog, check into intergenerational programs in your community or start one! It's not difficult. Check out your local churches; post it on the community bulletin boards, schools and veterinary practices. Check with friends and neighbors. You may find that they have had similar needs and found some terrific solutions.

Get someone (*after interviewing*) that you trust to come in once or twice a day to spend some quality time walking your, or your loved one's dog, making sure they have fresh water and are comfortable in their crates or confined areas in the house or outside kennels.

If someone you know has been moved due to age, illness and/or other reasons, and they have shared years with a beloved pet, it may be possible to integrate this pet into your life with this kind of help. At the very least, it will give you (and your loved one) some breathing time to transition into life without a pet.

For registered visiting teams: if you come across situations where it is emotional because someone has had to relinquish their pets to live in transitional care, be mindful that this may or may not be a good time to visit this person. Ask them directly if they want a pet visit, and discuss this with staff ahead of time.

Let them know it is not a "substitute" for their own pets, but if they want, they can share the joy on visits with yours.

There is no easy way to tell someone that they can no longer live, day-by-day, with their pet. When I think about this, it is almost unbearable. However, I know if it were me, and someone re-assured me that my pets would be loved and cared for, and that they could visit me, then I know if there was a chance to heal, this certainly would help 100%.

<http://intergenerational.cas.psu.edu>
www.epa.gov/aging/ia/examples.htm