

## **Preparing Your Dog For Back To School**

**Daniel Estep, Ph.D. and Suzanne Hetts, Ph.D.**

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This is the time of year when many families are preparing to send their children back to school. While many of us are thinking about buying books, pencils, clothes and planning schedules for our children, we should take some time to think about how our dogs will handle having the kids back at school.

Consider how your dog's life will change when the family is on a school schedule. She will probably be spending more time alone during the day. Not all dogs adjust to suddenly being left alone for long periods. You can prepare your pup for being left alone by practicing brief absences from home. Start with short absences, just a few minutes at a time, and gradually make them longer and more unpredictable in length. You want your dog to be comfortable with being left alone. If your dog is distressed with the absences, go back to shorter absences for a while. Don't leave her alone suddenly for long periods of time and expect her to be comfortable with it.

If your dog is going to be spending more time inside the house, prepare by "puppy proofing" the areas where she will be left and giving her things to keep her busy like chew toys, balls or food-stuffed bones. Be sure to give her a bath before she starts spending more time inside. It will be more pleasant for everyone. A self-service dog wash such as "Laund-Ur-Mutt" can make bathing your dog quick and easy. If your dog will be left outside more often, prepare by making sure the fence is secure and that she has adequate water and shelter. Pick up things you don't want destroyed or that could harm her and leave her with things to keep her busy.

Try to meet your dog's social needs while you are gone. Consider giving your dog some social time with a neighbor or friend's dog when the family is gone. Your friend's dog could come to your house to play on some days, and your dog could go to your friend's house on other days. Other alternatives are to take your dog to a doggie daycare facility or hire a person to come in and walk your dog when everyone is gone.

When your family is home, be sure to give your dog adequate time to socialize and play. Try to do things your dog enjoys such as playing fetch or going on walks. Give her adequate time to be with everyone so that both family and dog can enjoy each other.

It's important to remember that changes in our lives affect our pets. Don't take it for granted that they will cope with these changes – plan to meet their needs and help them to adjust.