

## CONCERNING THE OUTDOOR CHAINING/TETHERING OF DOGS

As a veterinarian, member of the American Veterinary Medical Association, the British Veterinary Medical Association, and with doctoral degrees in medicine and also animal behavior/ethology, and with 45 years' experience doing research in animal health and well-being, I wish to offer my professional opinion on the outdoor tying up of dogs.

The common practice in many communities, where it is not yet forbidden under local ordinance or is accepted with strictly specified time-restrictions and effective inspections and enforcement by animal control authorities, of keeping one or more dogs restrained on a chain or other material such as a wire cable or rope, is unacceptable for several reasons. Regardless of whether the dog has adequate shade and shelter and is provided water and sufficient freedom of movement so as not to become tangled or hung, being kept out on a chain/tether affects the flight and critical distance reactions of dogs.

The longer and more frequently a dog is kept outdoors under such restraint, the more the dog's behavior will change. Normal flight and critical (attack) distances are disrupted by such restraint, making friendly dogs more likely to become aggressive when approached by a stranger, turning timid dogs into so-called fear-biters and aggressive dogs into dangerous animals.

The longer and more frequently a dog is so restrained, the more behavioral abnormalities or pathologies are likely to develop from a combination of being physically, behaviorally, and psychologically confined to a life-space dictated by the length of the constraining tether. Signs of behavioral pathology, that are indicative of stress and emotional distress, include stereotypic (repetitive, obsessive-compulsive) pacing, spinning, running to and fro, frenzied chewing to get free, and displacement behaviors such as digging and excessive self-licking, even to the point of self-mutilation. Many such dogs bark and whine incessantly, resulting in cruel retribution when neighbors complain, or no less cruel surgical de-vocalization.

Some people believe that dogs are like wild animals and can adapt to being kept outdoors in any and all seasons, but this view is erroneous. Many breeds and individuals do not have adequate coats of insulating fur nor the metabolic capacity, especially the young and old, to adjust to cold temperatures. Cold exposure weakens their immune systems, leading to pneumonia and increased susceptibility to other infections and diseases. Extreme and prolonged cold exposure results in hypothermia, depression, and compromised circulation that leads to frostbite, requiring amputation of afflicted extremities. High ambient temperature and humidity can similarly compromise the immune system, cause behavioral depression, disorientation, shock, and collapse from hyperthermia: Coupled with dehydration from panting and lack of adequate water to drink, death is inevitable without emergency veterinary intervention. Also, dogs kept outdoors in hot climates and seasons can suffer interminably from biting insects that can cause infections, transmit diseases, permanently damage dogs' ears, and eat away parts of the dogs' bodies when flesh-eating fly larva (maggot) infestations take hold.

**The suffering of dogs chained outdoors, extremes of weather notwithstanding, is compounded by the fact that the dog is a pack animal and wants to be with his or her family and "master" in the house.** Such emotional/social deprivation is in many instances intensified by the outdoor dog seeing one or more pet dogs in the house who are never chained outside.

Nobel prize laureate and author of the best selling book *Man Meets Dog*, the late Dr. Konrad Lorenz, would insist that these tethered outside- dogs, who should be inside with their human pack, manifest a pathological disruption of their ethos or behavior, meaning a total distortion of their conceptual, emotional, and social space as a result of being confined to a universe defined by the length of their chains. This can make for a dangerous dog, turning a gentle dog into one that is more likely to attack and a trustworthy and friendly dog into a public safety risk, especially toward children.

Dogs who are routinely kept chained/tethered outdoors result in the most frequently reported public nuisance complaint for incessant and uncontrolled barking, and worse: Prolonged chaining/tethering can result in permanent changes in dogs' temperaments, making them hyper-excitable and unpredictable when set free. I have been consulted on several occasions, and served as an expert witness, for dog-bite cases involving children especially, but also adults, who were injured, in some cases fatally, by their own or neighborhood dogs. The best preventives are proper rearing, socialization, care, and handling of dogs, coupled with public education and effective enforcement of anti-cruelty and animal protection laws that include the prohibition of keeping dogs outdoors permanently chained/tethered.

I would concur with Dr. Lorenz, and, as author of a best-selling book myself, *Understanding Your Dog*, add that if dogs are to be outdoors they should be free to run and play, ideally with members of their own kind, rather than being alone, in a safe, confined area, for short periods of time during the day.

A 2007 bill in North Carolina to prohibit such mistreatment of dogs, like similar bills in other states, was defeated, in large part because of the effective lobbying of the American Kennel Club, for whom the suffering of thousands of dogs every day is of less concern than protecting the vested interests of those who find perverse profit in keeping dogs tied up outdoors most if not all of their lives. The compounding welfare concerns of exposure to climate extremes of heat and cold, too often with inadequate provision of shelter and even food and water, as documented on many occasions by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals and others, call for strict legislation and effective enforcement in every state of the union.

**In summary, from the perspectives not of tradition, custom, or cultural values, but of veterinary bioethics and animal behavior and welfare science, the prolonged tethering of dogs outdoors is inhumane and unethical.** It is likely to turn a good dog into an aggressive dog and a healthy dog into a neurotic and emotionally unstable one. The practice, therefore, of people tying their dogs up outside for hour upon hour should be prohibited by law in the name of compassion and in the spirit of a civil society that equates social progress with the humane treatment of all animals within the community.

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