

Responsible *pet* ownership:

How can your pet enjoy the great outdoors safely?

BY ELIZABETH IRELAND

Spending outdoor time with your pet is not only fun, it's also important to their well-being — an opportunity for exercise, fresh air and mental stimulation.

Professional dog trainer Christina Chandler is the founder and owner of Align Canine Training in Saskatoon. Chandler has some thoughts on how pets and their owners can safely enjoy the great outdoors together.

A professional member of the International Association of Canine Professionals (IACP), Chandler has worked with dogs for nearly two decades. Her work focuses on behaviour modification, addressing aggression and reactivity issues, loose leash walking, confidence building and communications, as well as foundation-building training for puppies.

“Over my career I've enjoyed owning many different breeds and types of dogs. I appreciate each for their unique characteristics and personalities,” says Chandler.

Dog owners need to know that their dog will be well-behaved around other pets and people before sharing an outdoor space. All dogs should know and obey the basic commands of come, sit and stay. “My number one rule is that a dog's behaviour should not be allowed to negatively affect anyone else — whether that's humans, other pets or wildlife,” says Chandler.

“It is my opinion that almost all training tools have meaningful applications and, since Saskatoon is lucky not to have any restrictions regarding tools, I'm in favour of whatever type of collar works for an individual and their dog. That said, I'm definitely a leash snob and prefer a four to six foot leather leash that allows me to keep my dog close and maintain a high level of control. Additionally, leather is very easy to grip, doesn't hurt your hands and lasts for years. The only real downside is that dogs like leather for chewing purposes,” she adds.

“It's good to remember that collars, leashes or other training tools are all inanimate objects and efficacy depends on the user.



Training your cat to walk on a leash is a safe way for your feline to enjoy the outdoors. (SUPPLIED)

The education a person receives regarding a specific tool and its application are going to be what's key. Dogs benefit from clear and consistent feedback from their owners; they want good management and a leader that they can trust and have fun with. Handing out free passes for inappropriate behaviour — even when our intentions are good — only creates more stress and uncertainty.”

For dog owners that adopt rescues, and perhaps do not know much about their dog's early life or genetics, Chandler suggests that new owners “try not to speculate on possible abuse or neglect in the dog's past and avoid focusing on the negative. Since dogs don't understand pity or sympathy, it's better to dedicate yourself to providing your new dog with a safe and happy home rather than worrying about what might have happened before they became part of your family.”

The City of Saskatoon offers off-leash dog parks for public enjoyment. However, it's important that owners don't allow their dog to become a nuisance to other people or animals. If a dog interferes with others, the owner must immediately restrain the dog by putting the

dog on a leash, not exceeding two metres (approximately six and half feet) in length. If the issue continues, the dog should leave the off-leash area.

As the birds start chirping, we can't forget about our feline friends. Cats can safely experience the great outdoors too, without running at large. One suggestion for cat owners is to buy or build an outdoor pet enclosure called a 'catio.' This way, cats can be out in the sunshine without being put at-risk by wildlife or wandering away and becoming one of the city's many stray cats.

Chandler, who is also a cat owner, says that catios provide “the best option for safety, as well as the opportunity to be outside.”

A harness and tether in an enclosed backyard seem to be another option that some cats enjoy. Spaying and neutering remain an important tool in reducing the city's stray cat population.

Align Canine Training offers a foundation-building starter pack for puppies, private lessons for adult dogs, and a variety of group classes. Learn more at aligncaninetraining.com.