

## 10 Ways to Help Dogs for the Holidays

**How to make a difference in your own dog's life or the lives of dogs in need this holiday season.**

*Rose Boccio*

Does seeing a down-and-out dog make you want to take him home? Well, if you can provide a loving home for an orphaned dog, do it.

But if you can't take Fido into your home, don't despair. So many ways exist to help dogs, from taking good care of your own dog, to collecting donations for your local shelter. Here are 10 ways you can help a dog in need during the season of giving.

1. **Adopt a dog.** Check with local shelters and rescue groups to find a dog who needs a good home. Remember, welcoming a dog into your home is the beginning of a long-term commitment. It's a wonderful act of love; just be sure you can back it up by being a responsible pet owner.
2. **Foster a furry friend.** Help puppies and dogs who need temporary homes. Some need socializing to prepare them for adoption; some have medical needs that require special attention; and others may be expecting a litter or may have just given birth and need privacy away from a shelter. Fostering is a great way to make a difference in many dogs lives — and in your own.
3. **Volunteer.** Your local shelters and dog-friendly organizations need lots of help. You could do anything from cleaning kennels and walking dogs to office work and helping with fundraising activities.
4. **Train for obedience.** Do your dog a favor and train him. It can be fun for the dog and the trainer, and it reinforces the bond between the two. Teaching your dog what is expected of him prevents problems for everyone. Check with veterinarians, breeders, shelters, parks, and recreation departments for classes.
5. **Have fun.** Play with your dog, pet him, walk him and even give him massages. If your dog is a hound, for example, give him extra time to follow interesting scents on your next walk together. These experiences make for a happy dog and strengthen the bond between owner and pet.
6. **Get him fixed.** If you're not a serious breeder, spay or neuter your puppy. Spaying or neutering your dog can prevent some health problems, such as certain cancers. It is one of the best decisions you can make for your pet's well-being. Ask your vet about its benefits and the best time to schedule the procedure.
7. **Visit the vet regularly.** Vets check for major health problems and develop a program of preventive care, including a series of vaccinations, for your pet. Your dog's doc can help you keep your dog healthy with advice and information. And when a problem arises, you'll be glad your vet is just a phone call away.
8. **Take care of his teeth.** Dogs with gum disease can lose more than a tooth. Bacteria travel through the bloodstream, compromising the dogs overall health. So, take good care of your doggie's teeth. Bad breath could be an early warning sign of gum problems. Ask your vet how to brush your dog's teeth at home and arrange for regular checkups. If plaque has already built up on your dog's teeth, or his gums are raw or bleeding, see the vet right away.