

Ask A Vet: Water Safety for Your pets

Saturday, May 20, 2017

Dear Dr. Weldy's,

We just recently got our boat out onto the lake and we want to take our 7 year old cockapoo with us as we plan on being out on the boat most weekends. Is there anything we need to be aware of or we should do for him?

-Lake Bums

Dear Lake Bums,

What fun! Being outdoors with your pet is a wonderful thing to do and when you think of water activities such as pools, lakes, rivers or even oceans there are a wide variety of things to take into consideration. Naturally the first misconception is that all dogs are swimmers, right? Not at all. In fact dogs really paddle and don't swim. That being said, it is important to introduce your pet to water slowly so as not to frighten them. It is best if your dog is obedience trained on the ground to help ensure the dog listening and obeying in the pool or at the lake. If the pet disobeys you on land, you can bet the pet will disobey you on water.

It is important to protect your pet from drowning. There are certain breeds that are better suited for water than others. Any of the breeds that have the short snouts such as your brachycephalic breeds like pugs, Bostons terriers or bull dogs are not at the top of the list for doing well in water and would be better suited to be land dogs. That being said, I do have clients that have English Bulldogs and they do take their dogs on the boat all the time but they also have life vests fitted for them should they accidentally fall overboard. The old wives' tale of just throwing them in is not a good idea either. It is never a good idea to leave your dog unattended when around water as well. Unfortunately, we have had some clients that have lost pets in ponds. This can happen in winter as well where there is frozen ice on ponds that are not completely frozen and the animal can fall through the ice. If you have a pool, it is a good idea to have a fence around it to deter the animal going in when you are not around (works for neighbor kids as well). If there are steps to get in and out of the pool, one can practice with the pet going in and out using the steps. Just as with humans, swimming can be exhausting. Be sure to allow rest time for you and your pets.

Other tips for your pets around water in the summer is to be sure not to let your dog drink out of lakes and rivers where they can pick up algae or parasites. Pool water is chlorinated and ocean water is salty which can give them tummy aches. Be sure to rinse your pets off after swimming in pools or the oceans so as to not allow the chlorine/salt to dry out their skin. Have fresh water available as much as possible. Lastly be sure to dry out those ears after swimming to prevent ear infections. Have a great summer!

-Dr. Wanda Schmeltz