

Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

I'm really in a quandary. I live in a nice neighborhood, and really try to be a good neighbor, and a good pet owner. However, it seems that I can't walk out my door, without running into someone else's dog, loose and begging! I don't want to complain, because if I do, the poor animals are tied or locked up until the owners forget someone has complained. But I do feel I should be able to walk my own dog, and not always feel guilty and overwhelmed by animals I do not own!! A dog on my doorstep for a few hours is ok. I keep clean water out for them. From sunrise to sunset and beyond seems a bit much to me. I wonder why these people own dogs? I also wonder why they don't know where the dog is, and why they don't care! It seems that I have two choices: one, to put up with inconsiderate neighbors, or, two, to risk that the poor animal will be punished for any complaint I make? Is there any way that I can communicate with these owners who do not seem to care about their dogs? Or more importantly, is there any way I can justify this lack of concern from the owners, so that I do not resent the animals? Thanks for your help.

-- Too Doggone Much

Dear Doggone,

It's clear from your letter that you have a big place in your heart for animals – not just your own, but also the four-legged urchins that run around your neighborhood. Clearly, your concern is for these neglected pets, and your letter touches my own animal-loving heart.

Have you tried speaking with these pet owners? I'm not talking about confronting them in any aggressive way, but, rather, telling them how you feel? That would be my first recommendation. Be honest, authentic. Let them know that you care about their dogs and, in fact, make sure that there is fresh water for them at your own house. Tell them that you hesitated to have this conversation because you were concerned that they might take it out on the dog by restraining him/her. Though, honestly Doggone, I would prefer see a dog tied up or otherwise confined, than to see it hit by a car or at risk for some other danger.

You can express your feelings. You can make your concerns known. What you cannot do is make these pet owners care for their precious charges with the same soulful compassion you do. This is hard to accept, but accept it you must. If you feel that these dogs are being abused or neglected to the point of physical harm (e.g., being kept outside without a doghouse or shelter during freezing winter months), you should – indeed, you must – call animal control officers or the local ASPCA. This is unacceptable behavior. But if the animals are just not being given the care and concern you give your own pets, then I'm afraid there is little you can do. You cannot make these folks cherish their animal companions as you do. If push comes to shove, and these neighbors do not listen to your concerns, you can invoke local leash laws (most communities have them), and bring the law to bear on the owners who let their dogs run wild around your neighborhood. This is not fair to joggers, kids on bikes, or other dogs being walked on leashes by their owners.

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3/10/04

If the owners of these pets are reading this, I hope they will remember the great joy, devotion, and companionship that their dogs extend to them. Companion animals want nothing more than the basic necessities -- food, water, and shelter – and our presence. What we give back is so little compared to the unconditional love that they give to us. Keep your pet safe from danger. Give him/her what they need. Spend a little time playing and accompanying them in their daily lives. The expenditure is small. The reward is great. Having a pet as a companion is a superior investment. We receive so much more than we give.

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2004 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) Columns are archived at www.fullpotentialliving.com.