



## **Social Isolation in Dogs: The Hidden Cruelty**

Social isolation of dogs is one of the most prevalent form of cruelty against dogs and yet many of the people who are guilty of this offense have no idea that they are doing it.

Social isolation of dogs refers to the act of **segregating a dog from social interaction with its family**. We most often associate social isolation with chained dogs but social isolation also occurs in dogs that are kenneled or confined. The term 'chained dogs' refers to the act of tethering a dog by chain, rope or cable to a stationary object like a dog house or stake in the ground. Animal welfare organizations spend an excessive amount of time and resources investigating reports and trying to educate owners of chained dogs.

Unfortunately most investigations of chained dogs reveal dogs that have never received veterinary care, and are in need of adequate food, water and shelter. These needs are physical and easy to see and change. The damage that goes unnoticed by owners, that is not tangible, is the damage caused by lack of social interaction, stimulation and exercise.

### **Why Social Interaction is So Important**

Our domesticated dogs evolved from wild ancestors that lived in family groups called packs. As we domesticated and bred dogs to suit our needs they learned to substitute humans and other family pets for their pack. Having a 'pack' is essential to a dog. It is not a natural instinct for a dog to live alone deprived of simple pleasures like sniffing, running and checking out its environment. The need to interact with people, other animals and their environment is a part of a dog's biological and psychological makeup.

### **Problems Created by Social Isolation**

Social isolation causes intense boredom, anxiety and often leads to aggression. Statistics show that a chained dog is 3 times more likely to bite and the chained dog responsible for most bites is male and un-neutered. Many bites in children result from wandering into the reach of a chained dog or from encountering a chained dog that has broken free.

#### **Signs of stress from social isolation include:**

- methodical pacing
- destruction -chewing up their house, food containers etc.
- constant barking
- excessive licking
- self mutilation
- lunging
- fear biting

- defeated, listless behavior (by this point the dog has given up)

A dog that is or has exhibited any of these signs of social isolation is trying to tell you about its stressful situation. A dog that is tied onto a dog house nearly all the time and barks constantly (much to the annoyance of neighbors) is literally crying out for help.

### **Social Isolation and the Law**

The government of NL has recently introduced the Animal Health and Protection Act. In the Act Subsection Schedule B: Basic Standards of Dog Care clearly defines owner's responsibilities for care and shelter for outdoor dogs. **Above all the Act has realized the necessity of social interaction for dogs and has made it a daily requirement by law.**