

Finding your pet philosophy

There are as many theories on how to approach pet care as there are individual dogs and cats.

Confusing?absolutely.

Every vet you talk to, pet store you go in, dog trainer you speak to, dog walker you encounter have their own opinion on how you should raise and care for your pet. Some of these opinions are grounded in education and experience... others not.

How do you find your way through this maze of opinion and master good healthy pet care ?

There are many good books and internet articles written by North America's leading pet care experts and these can be useful for helping you to develop your own personal philosophy and approach to pet care. But how can you cut the confusion of everyone's opinion?

Over the years I have encountered many confused dog and cat lovers as they are pulled from product to product, trainer to trainer, vet to vet....often with conflicting information. So I have given a lot of thought to this issue. Here are a few tips that you may find helpful.

1. Take recommendations from others.

Your friends, family, work colleagues..... the people you meet at the dog park. Ask them all, where they shop, which vet clinic they use and why. If you keep hearing the same names and the reason for them using that person or place leaves you feeling like it is what you are looking for....congratulations !...you have a starting place.

2. Visit the pet supplies store that has got your attention.

Spend time there. Listen to the interaction of the staff with other customers. Are they attentive? Are they answering the questions of customers in a meaningful and informed manner? Do you feel comfortable in the store? Remember, the right information and good recommendations will save you money and heartache in the long run. Cheap, poorly made products are a deferred payment plan....you

will pay out all that you have saved later and often much more fixing something that did not work out. You don't want the latest fad in food.....your dog or cat does not need to be turned into a guinea pig (no disrespect to guinea pigs !).

Choose a store that has the right intentions; the store that has taken the time to educate their staff and where the knowledge base is broad and up to date. Find a staff member within that store that you connect with and try to deal with them each time you are reviewing products to help you care for your pets. A consistent approach helps to keep your pet in optimal health.

3. Have a list of questions for your first visit to the vet.

Firstly always choose your vet based on recommendations not, price and convenience. Remember you are putting your pet's life in their hands. Do they recommend every vaccine or do they target the diseases that your pet is most at risk from? Do they do multiple vaccines at one time or do they believe in breaking the vaccines up and giving a single vaccine at a time? Ask your vet her personal opinion on vaccination protocols. Don't be afraid to ask " What do you do for your pet ? " Does the clinic offer an after hours emergency service ? Are they equipped with an operating room to deal with your pet's surgical needs in house ? Is there more than one vet in the clinic ? Do they have well trained veterinary technicians, stable staff. Is the clinic busy ?

4. Research your breed and species.

The more you know about the health challenges your pet may face the more you can do on a preventative basis. Prevention is always better than cure. Be informed.

5. Holistic ?

One of the most overused and confusing buzz words in pet products is.....

" Holistic "

Part of the confusion is caused by the fact that there is no formal definition of the term " holistic ".

Holistic is " all inclusive ".

Holistic is a whole made up of interdependent parts. To think holistically, we must consider everything to be connected. We must understand the body is a symbiotic unit and consider each part in it's relation to the others. We must respect the whole unit and care for it with it's parts in mind.

In health and wellness, we are most likely to hear these parts referred to as the mind/ body connection; mind/ body/ spirit, or physical/ mental/ emotional/ spiritual aspects. When we apply healing to our pet's in a holistic manner it means that we must explore and consider the root cause of the illness; the point at which we lost " balance ". We must consider both conventional (allopathic) medicine and complementary (alternative) remedies.

Holistic is a synonym for complementary remedies or therapies.

Holistic is not one thing. It is not one action, one ingredient, one approach. In a broad perspective holistic means considering the whole person or pet and the whole situation.

In taking an holistic approach to pet care you must surround you and your pet with the people, products, services and environment that will :

- Balance and integrate you and your pet's physical, mental, emotional and spiritual aspects
- Consider and maintain a respectful, cooperative relationships with others and the environment
- Make wellness-oriented product and lifestyle choices
- Actively participate in your pet's health decisions and healing process.

A Holistic product is one that uses ingredients raised and cared for with respect. Where interference is minimal. Where the mind and body connection is considered and maintained. It is where everything from a grain, a seed, a fruit, an animal source is treated with respect and gentility.

A terrorized, slaughtered animal, a chicken kept in a cage and force fed cannot become a part of a holistic product or the holistic care of your animal.

Holistic is much more than a word on a package.

Choose your pets food VERY carefully. If it sounds too good to be true....it likely is !

This is probably the most confusing part of pet care. Foods burst onto the market and always claim to be better than everything else. Occasionally they are. Often they are not.

Here are a few myths you will encounter:

- **Raw is best !**

TRUTH: Just like dry and canned foods, there are very well made, safe, quality raw diets and cheap, unhealthy, bacterial laden raw diets.

- **All foods are the same, the price is the only difference**

TRUTH: Whether you are making food for humans or pets, quality, healthy, human grade and organic ingredients cost more than their counterparts that are wilting and are no longer fresh and full of nutrients. You can buy the later cheaper and you can therefore make your product cheaper.

- **High protein diets are the best for all pets**

TRUTH: High protein diets are great for some pets at certain stages in their lives but they are not for everyone (pet).

Pet Food is a big topic and one that I spend a lot of time on. I research companies, their products, talk to the people that make them and search for their integrity. It takes time, lots of time but it is important as it is the foundation of our pet's precious lives.

Surround yourself with the right people to help you care for your pet and the relationship you have with them will be a meaningful and stress free one.

Donna,

Your Pet Pals