

CHAINING A DOG

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Well of course we all use leashes to control our pets on walks and in public places. Unless they are perfectly behaved their lunging, running away, darting into traffic, and going where we don't want them to go is inhibited by a leash. If we are on foot most of us, myself included will even tether them outside to a sign post or rail just like the old cowboys did with their horses. This is only for a very short time so they will remain where we left them in safety, until we come out of the store or post office. Would we then think that they should be left behind for hours and days on that tether? Heavens no ! Common sense, logic, and humaneeness will dictate that we would not do that to a beloved pet. Let me be the devils advocate for a moment here and elaborate some possible positive reasons to tether a pet for a longer time. They may not bear scrutiny but I'll throw them out anyway. So you own a dog, he has no training (you never bothered), you have no fence, no money to build one, and you work all day. So you chain him up outside for 10-12 hours a day. He can't come inside at night because he has no toilet manners, and he chews up the furniture so you chain him up all night outside as well. You care about him, you feed and water him, you just probably ought not to own a dog at all let alone this handful. He barks incessantly at his fate, and just wants to be paid attention to. He ends up being very territorial and aggressive around his personal space. His life is one of never ending boredom, interspersed with an occasional pat on the head from you. Another scenario might be that you have a fence but ole Buck knows how to dig underneath, or jump over the top of said fence and he frequently goes out of the yard to freedom, busy to roam, bite, fight, harass and breed. Oh I almost forgot ,you haven't bothered to neuter him, something about him losing his maleness. So you keep him chained up. It's that or he goes to the pound to be killed if he bites again. What's worse, the chain or one last race to freedom before the quickness of the needle? You decide!

I once visited the tiny Alaskan village of Noatak where native Eskimos lived their lives and kept various dogs as so called pets. They really weren't thought of so much as pets, but were kept as potential sled dogs for the winter months. These are considered working dogs by some and symbols of a cultural past by others. When a young dog is growing up they are allowed to roam the village for about six months, visiting and receiving attention from everyone in the village, and then they are tethered to an outside dog house on a short chain 24/7 for the rest of their lives. They are rarely ever used on a dog sled as most of the residents use snow mobiles instead for transportation. There are a few folks who take pride in their dog team and work them all year long, but in between they go back on to the tether again. Most of them are not walked or allowed to exercise and just spend their lives doing whatever is possible between the dog house and the extent of the length of the chain. Even in the dark of winter when the dog house is deep under the snow the dog still stays tied out, must burrow down to get to shelter in the dog house, and crawl

back up to fresh air to eliminate, urinate, and eat whatever food is offered. Most of them are quite thin and in need of more calories. The area around the dog house is grossly contaminated with massive amounts of feces. It is cruel to see, and gut wrenching not to be able to do anything about it. The dogs are rarely interacted with, and are more possessions than living, breathing canines. These forlorn creatures deserve much better than this. When one evaluates these dogs we can see that they are starved for attention and desperately want and need to get off that tether to exercise and be a real dog. In my practice here, I have seen a number of dogs chronically tied out in back yards. These dogs can be difficult to approach, territorial and aggressive. I have treated wounds where chains or collars have damaged the tissues around the neck from becoming too tight, or from constant pulling against the confines of the chain. I have also treated dogs that have become entangled in the tie out, and suffer injuries and damage to their legs or overexertion injury from struggling to free themselves in their owner's absence.