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BOXER REHOMING

The service we offer is to coordinate Boxers needing homes with people who want to offer homes. We don't take in Boxers per se unless sick and needing care when we try to get them into a rescue centre. So it is very much a "dating service". You may have to make arrangements to travel to meet someone trying to home a Boxer, or you may get a call from us that a Boxer is in a pound or rescue centre and can you call up to see it and book it out, etc. We home check potential owners where possible before matching them with a Boxer but after that you might have to do a little bit of legwork yourself, as one of our main problems is time constraints.

DO YOU REALLY WANT A BOXER ?!?

Boxers love to be part of the family and do not thrive if shut away in a kennel. All Boxers coming from rescue are expected to be allowed into your house for part of the day/at night. If you have a small house with a small garden then a Boxer may not be for you. They don't need a huge garden once you are prepared to commit to exercise but they are a physically large dog and take up space. We also find a good percentage of Boxers come into rescue because one partner in the household was not actually too keen on the idea but found themselves swayed by the second partner and the pleadings of children!

PLEASE BE HONEST.

If you are extremely house-proud, don't really want a dog [or a large dog at any rate] in your house and/or garden, don't really like Boxers, etc, then you are perfectly entitled to feel like this and we would much rather you didn't let yourself be persuaded otherwise. Likewise if you know in your heart and soul that your partner really doesn't want a Boxer then please don't apply pressure and don't allow the kids to either. Everyone has the right to live as they want and many people either aren't "doggie" people or only want/feel comfortable with a small dog, so please make sure everyone in the household is committed to the idea of taking on a rescue Boxer before you proceed. If not our experience is the dog ends up suffering in the end – the number of Boxers that come into rescue after ultimatums is quite high as young Boxers can be boisterous and pushy, and things just come to a head. We have in the past turned down prospective owners when it was patently obvious during the home check that one partner was considerably less than enthusiastic. It is very frustrating discussing this afterwards with the enthusiastic half and realising that they are so intent on getting a Boxer that they are completely ignoring what is staring them in the face – and expecting us to do the same!

TIMING

Consider what is going on your life or household at the moment before committing yourself to a rescue Boxer. Will anyone be sitting important exams in the next few months? Are you thinking of building an

extension or having major household repairs carried out? Holidays coming up shortly? You should be in a position of having a relatively free schedule for the first few weeks/months after you take on a rescue to give everyone a chance to make it work. If not make that clear when you apply and we can put your application on hold for the time being until you are ready.

AGE

Please don't dismiss the older Boxer as not being suitable. An older Boxer (7 years+) has often great advantages. They have many good years still to give a home yet are more settled and less demanding than a younger dog. If prepared to consider an older dog you can often get matched up much sooner as many people only want a young dog and you will have to wait your turn. There is something very satisfying and rewarding about rescuing an older Boxer that may not otherwise have got another chance, and the bond is often stronger because of it. In some cases bitches come into rescue after they have been extensively bred from, often in dreadful and cramped conditions, with no quality of life. To see them develop from being timid and submissive dogs into confident and happy members of a loving family is wonderful and we know of many people who wouldn't swap their older rescued Boxer for love nor money!

YOUNG CHILDREN

Before your Boxer arrives make sure that younger children understand that their new Boxer will be a fully paid up member of the family with rights to rest and privacy, and is not just a living toy. At the same time start from day one to train your Boxer that chewing up the children's toys is not an acceptable way to behave. Teach the children and the dog to respect each other and they will become firm friends. Young Boxers in particular need rest and over excitement can lead to boisterous excesses, which means they may "play bite" as young puppies do, and then people panic. Try to make sure that you have some part of the day, however short, for your Boxer alone. These can take the form of short training sessions, games or just cuddles, but your new dog needs to feel that he can have some of your time just for himself.

RULES

Decide before your Boxer arrives where he will sleep and stick to it. Most Boxers are happiest with their bed in your bedroom! However as many people are not too keen on this make sure that he sleeps where you want him to on the first night, even if he cries or barks for the first few nights. He will usually settle happily enough when he feels more secure in his new home. Like children, Boxers need to learn their boundaries and must learn these from day one. If you don't want your Boxer on the three-piece, don't let him get on it on the first day. He won't understand why he can do things one day and not on the next. Always be consistent with your house rules. He will quickly understand if your rules never vary, but will be confused if they do. You are also teaching him that it is OK to ignore you if he gets away with doing things you have forbidden on previous occasions. **Don't ever** engage in rough and tumble play sessions with your Boxer i.e. boxing matches, rolling around on ground, etc. It makes it harder to train him not to jump up on people and more importantly the dog thinks every time he sees you that he is going to get this game and he becomes overexcited, barking, etc. It can be very annoying so don't start down this road at all! Male Boxers do need to know who is pack leader i.e. You! Never let him go in front of you through a door, make sure you are doing things like walks, etc, on your terms, always to try to eat your meals before him - and even pretend to take some food from his bowl before you feed him!

PREPARATION

As is the nature of rescue you may receive a call that a suitable Boxer is available but needs to be moved a.s.a.p. Therefore you should have the following basics put by in a garage or shed to tide you over until you can get properly organised.

- Old bedding (blanket, sleeping bag but not a feather duvet – see Stress below)
- Small bag of plain dog mixer not dog meal
- 2-3 tins good quality tinned food or something like “Nature’s Diet”
- 2 plastic or metal bowls – one for water/one for food
- Couple of rubber toys

THE FIRST DAY

Please take things easy. Don't invite all your friends and family around to meet your new Boxer. It will take him all his time to sniff out every corner of your home and to introduce himself to you and your immediate family members. He won't be able to relax or sleep until he has done this, and feels safe. To overwhelm your Boxer with too many introductions will almost certainly result in over excitement or, in the case of a nervous dog, a frightening experience which will take several days to overcome. Keep things as calm as you can, don't feed him until he has quietened down a bit, and give him time and space to come to terms with his new surroundings. There will be plenty of time to introduce him to everyone, and in any case the introductions will go more smoothly if the dog is not feeling up tight and insecure.

FEEDING

We try as hard as we can to give you as much information as possible about your new Boxer, including the feeding regime he is used to, but of course in some cases this is not possible. Unless a specific diet is needed via a vet's surgery we normally recommend you feed him whatever good quality dried/tinned food is stocked in the supermarket you do your weekly shop. It can be a hassle to run out of food and realise that the vet is closed until Monday. Dried food is convenient but if not used to it mix in tinned food (chunks in gravy, etc) and gradually decrease the amount. Split the daily recommended food into two meals as this reduces the possibility of bloat, and don't let your dog exercise or run around until at least an hour after he eats. Continue with the same diet, at the same time each day as it will help enormously with the settling in process. If you wish to make variations to the diet please do it gradually because sudden changes in diet can lead to tummy troubles - the last thing you and your Boxer need. If his usual feeding bowl comes with him, it is a good idea to use it, at least initially, as it will look and smell familiar to him in his new strange world. If it is horribly tatty and unhygienic it can always be discarded in a week or so when it will have served its purpose.

SEPARATION

A rescued dog is a very different proposition from a new puppy who will settle very quickly. Your new Boxer has been uprooted from the home he knows, not knowing why, probably taken on a strange car journey by strange people and when left with you will feel very unsettled and bewildered. You know your home; he needs to learn about it, he needs plenty of time to feel his way around. This is when he may scratch the doors or start to chew if shut in. Don't leave him for lengthy periods. If you need to go out do it in stages, start with 5 minutes and praise him if all is well. Gradually you can increase the time, he will soon get the message that you are coming back. Find a special toy to give him when you are away – treat balls are ideal -- this means he associates your absence with a special big treat which is good and it will also occupy him when you are gone. Take it up and store when you return.

STRESS

Even though your Boxer appears delighted to be in his new home please remember there is always some degree of stress taking place which might not be immediately apparent. There are two main ways this can manifest itself:

(a) Digestive System

Don't worry if your Boxer's tummy appears upset the first few days! Can have the "runs" or refuse to eat, or bring food back up. If this only lasts a few days and the dog is otherwise in good form then it's just a settling in period, and can sometimes be due to a different water source in your house. If it persists and/or the dog is listless or you are worried then by all means take him to your vet but in the meantime don't panic.

(b) Destructive Behaviour

Please have some patience for the first 0-4 weeks. **DON'T** leave your new Boxer lying on your couch the first time you go out or give him a duvet stuffed with feathers! Dogs that have been moved from their first home with maybe a stay in kennels or a pound in between can be very insecure for the first little while and this can manifest itself in destructive behaviour for a short period. Typical for the first initial period is tearing up bedding, soft toys, cushions, soft furnishings, etc, when left on their own. This reduces and eventually ceases entirely but in the meantime leave your dog somewhere comfortable but "bomb proof" until both you and he are confident he is settled in. Ideal place is a utility room or corner of a kitchen with no access to other areas, or a collapsible cage (but only for short periods). Above all remove possible temptations so the dog doesn't start behaviour and bad habits that can cause problems in the long run.

EXERCISE

Boxers are not a breed you can bring to the park on a Sunday morning and forget about the rest of the week, unless you have huge space at home i.e. 0.5 acre or more. If you live in the average urban area with an average size garden you must commit yourself to 45 minutes minimum a day – otherwise please don't consider one. We find really early in the morning is best. There are less people about and you can usually let him have a good run. In general Boxers will sleep more in winter months – once it gets dark they tend to go to bed – so in the summer months you might have "top up" with a short walk in the evenings as well – more to break up the monotony of the day and get out for a while. Believe me - if you get used to getting on a beach or into a park very early in the morning by setting your alarm clock an hour early before work you actually get into the habit and find it a very nice way to start the day once you get into the swing of it! Certainly if you work and have to leave the dog for part of the day it is important he gets a run before you leave and this is the secret to managing him. Feed him after his walk and the combination of exercise and food means he will actually sleep a good deal of the day and not expend energy digging up your garden and causing a nuisance of himself.

JUMPING UP!

Unfortunately when some Boxers come into rescue they may not have had the strong training they need and one problem can be jumping up to greet people. With consistent effort though, this can be solved.

1. One method that works is a small **water spray**.
2. Fill with cold water
3. Hide behind your back
4. When the dog jumps up say "Down" or another specific command in a loud voice
5. Quickly squirt him on his nose and then hide spray again.
6. Don't make a fuss of him, don't greet him, just walk away without acknowledging him and discreetly put the spray away. He won't like it but it won't harm him.
7. Keep calm and act as if nothing has happened.
8. If he starts to behave submissively when you do this PLEASE DON'T FEEL SORRY FOR HIM! This is the result you want.
9. Don't start calling him back over and letting him put his paws up. You are sending him mixed signals and he won't be trained like this.
10. Keep this up and the dog will associate the command with the water squirt. You have to plan in this training i.e. when you leave the house leave the spray outside the first door he will greet you at etc.

Another good method is to buy **training discs** from a pet shop. This is a short piece of strong cord in a loop with about 5 large solid metal discs on the cord. When you throw them on the ground they make a terrible racket and the dog will jump back. Don't let him know it is you doing it!

1. Come through the door with discs behind your back
2. When he jumps up use the command & throw them hard on the ground behind you
3. Let him jump back as he will get a fright
4. Discretely pick them up and walk away without acknowledging or greeting him.
5. Probably the advantage of the discs is you can carry them around easily and hide quickly i.e. in a pocket or up a sleeve.

You must ignore the bad behaviour - i.e. jumping up on you – completely by not greeting or acknowledging the dog as otherwise the dog is getting what he wants - YOUR ATTENTION (and don't forget to a dog giving out to him for jumping up IS attention !). You must be tough with this training and not give in because you feel sorry for him. It is not acceptable to jump up on people and they must understand this for their own good. When he starts to greet you without diving up on then you praise and greet him – until then ignore the bad behaviour, use the water spray or discs, keep walking away from him after he gets back down and be consistent.

LEAD TRAINING

Boxers **MUST** be trained to walk well on a lead. If not what tends to happen is the walk is not enjoyable, the owner starts to avoid bringing him out, the dog is not exercised enough and the situation can quickly spiral out of control until perhaps the dog has to come back into rescue. Some rescue Boxers are fine on leads but others need some training. Consider attending a training class.

If the dog is pulling on the lead it is important that you don't "reward" him by continuing the walk i.e. on his terms. Make sure you have a choke collar, not an ordinary leather one with a buckle. Chain ones are fine and easy to find, but strong fabric ones work best. Every time he pulls stop walking immediately, say No firmly, gently pull him back alongside you, and make him wait a second or two, praise him and give him a little titbit of food. Keep this up – it will take some time – but this is something you must crack or you will not be able to manage to exercise him.

"OFF LEAD" TRAINING

Boxers are large and energetic and both you and the dog benefit greatly if they can have free running as part of their walks! If lucky you may live near open fields and have them to yourself, but more than likely it will be areas where other people walk with or without dogs.

Boxers more than most breeds are very people friendly and tend to rush up to strangers to say hello, so it is **VITAL** they are trained to recall so you can clip a lead back on when you feel it necessary, otherwise they will only cause annoyance to others, fuel complaints and leave you feeling you can't let your dog off the lead.

It's important that a few times a day from the first day you get your rescue Boxer (i.e. around the house and garden) you call him by his name and when he comes to you praise him and give him a titbit. This gets him used both to the sound of his name and also to the idea that if he returns to you he gets rewarded. After this, still in your own home, throw a tennis ball for him in the garden but only 2 or 3 times a day – stop after that – this whets his appetite for more games which is part of the training below.

Unless you are in the confines of your own garden do not immediately let him off the lead, he needs to gain trust and confidence in you and this may take at least 3 weeks. Flexi leads are a good idea at this time, but remember to get a strong one! Also assess his behaviour with other dogs before letting him loose – see "Socialisation" section.

When it is time to let him off the lead, follow these steps consistently.

First you must find out what attracts your dogs attention. We find a combination of a small squeaky rubber toy (easily found in pet shops), tennis ball and titbits (cheese, biscuits or baked liver in little pieces) in your pocket is an excellent combination to obedience train a Boxer to recall so try this method first.

1. Walk the dog when not too many other people around.
2. Let off the lead but only let him run a short distance (10-15 feet)
3. Call his name and press the squeaky toy (still in your pocket) a few times to get his attention.
4. When he's looking at you take the tennis ball out of your pocket and throw up and down in the air to get his interest – he'll recognise the ball as being "fun".
5. Pick a phrase like "who has the ball" and keep repeating in a sing-song voice
6. He will come back over to you – we've never met a Boxer yet who failed to run back at the smell of a game!
7. Clip back on his lead, put the ball in your pocket and give him a titbit telling him he's a good boy.
8. If he keeps nudging your pocket for the ball again then you must have a phrase to denote the ball game is over i.e. when the ball goes back in your pocket show your empty hands and say "all gone" – after a few times the dog will immediately lose interest as he has worked out this means the game is over.
9. Walk on for a bit and then repeat for 5-10 times (squeaky/ball/clip lead/praise/titbit).

When you're happy with his obedience you can extend step 6 above by throwing the ball for him to increase the reward he feels he is getting by recalling. Start by training him in your garden to retrieve the ball before you do this out in the open.

Another important element is to limit strictly your dog's playtime with squeakies/tennis balls to when he is out walking i.e. don't keep doing it at home, have tennis balls lying around everywhere, etc. This has to be a special treat that the dog doesn't get too often so as to increase the attraction. Familiarity breeds contempt!

If done properly this method gives you the option of getting the dog back to you to clip his lead back on if needed or to keep throwing the ball to completely distract him for a while so that he doesn't notice people/dogs passing him by in the distance. Also don't ever let him run off too far before recall – he must get into the habit that he stays with you when out walking and is not allowed to charge off investigating people and dogs in the distance where you are not in control.

The advantage to using both a squeaky and a tennis ball is if you don't have one of them some day you can still usually manage to improvise using the other element, or the mere sight of you putting your hand in your pocket can be enough after a while. Gradually however you'll find the dog will come back through habit without the props as this is what is expected of him.

Always associate coming back to you as a pleasure and you should have no problems. Never, never scold him when he comes back to you: however long you have had to wait.

Before letting your Boxer off leave please get a name disc for his collar with your phone numbers. Don't put his name on the disc in case he is enticed by calling it. It is still the most effective way to have your dog returned to you. Remember to that we hear many stories of stolen Boxers. Don't ever leave them tied up outside shops and put a padlock on your garden gates – the rigid half circle bicycle lock are very effective.

SOCIALISATION

Depending on your dog's history he may or may not be well socialised with other dogs. We can assess the dog first but the real test is when he is out and about and how he reacts. Training classes will help, and

bringing the dog places all the time where he will meet other dogs breaks down any barriers. Don't let your dog loose near other dogs until you are sure of his temperament. It is very important that under no circumstances do you let your dog get into a fight or put him any position that he might have to defend himself. This can set up a chain of nervous aggression that can be very difficult to cure. If you have a male rescue and you come across a friendly female out walking that's a good opportunity to give him some space to play and establish friendly behaviour as males and female don't normally fight. It's with other males you must be careful. In general Boxers don't tend to start fights – but they can be quick off the mark in diving in if they feel threatened or if the other dog starts to snarl or bark. That can happen sometimes if they are too friendly with a small dog who then feels threatened by the Boxer's size – and a fight in this situation would be very unequal. Remember too that if you come across a dog walker with their dog on a lead in an area where dogs usually can be let off to run around there is probably a reason for it i.e. their dog's temperament is unsound so don't let your Boxer under any circumstances run up to it or a nasty situation can develop. Keep your eyes open when your dog is off the lead and quickly call him and clip a lead back on him if you are unsure of a potential situation/dogs approaching. Better be safe than sorry! You will get to know your dog better over the months and feel more confident. The best method is to train your dog to stay with you and not bother with other people and their dogs, and NEVER let him get in a fight. We've known Boxer to turn overnight after a fight to spending the rest of their lives looking over their shoulders ready to go for anything that moves.

MORE THAN ONE DOG

Don't get a second dog until your first one is with you at least 6 months and is over 12 months old. One problem that can ensue with more than one dog if they are both very young is they have each other, and don't need you or depend on you to the same extent as if they were single dogs in a house. By training and having good manners on the first Boxer the second one tends to follow the first dog's example.

The easiest solution, and the most successful one, is to choose the opposite sex to your first dog. For the most part, rescued dogs will already be spayed/neutered or you will be required to neuter a bitch, so this will not be a problem.

In dog society bitches usually call all the shots and the male very rarely resents this. He is quite happy to let his companion call all the shots, and it usually takes an adult bitch about a week to put a pushy adult male in his place - sometimes considerably less!

Two Boxers however can be a handful even with the best of training. All Boxers play very roughly together, they tend to charge around when excited and physically they may be too strong together if one person is lead walking both at the same time and they decide to investigate the cat that runs out in front of them - so don't feel you must have "another Boxer". We know this because we home many Boxers who have been bought as puppies to provide company for the first one but the owner found them too much together when both became adults. If you really want a second dog (and there is no doubt that Boxers love other canine company) what can work well is a medium sized i.e. more lightweight non-pedigree dog such as a collie or spaniel cross. It can be easier for children when out walking if you can take the Boxer and they have an easier dog to manage, and when off the lead they most likely would behave differently so you tend not to have "double trouble". Go for one with a quiet but good temperament and again opposite sex and younger to what you have. Rescue centres and pounds all over regularly have dogs such as this crying out for good homes. There is no problem if you have had a Boxer from us in the past, you will still go on the list like everyone else – we don't ration our Boxers! In fact if we've placed a dog with you already then we already know it is a good home.

FIRST MEETINGS

Try to introduce new dogs on neutral ground. Your existing dog will be very protective and territorial in his own home and garden. A local park or common is better, or even the street if there is nowhere else. Try not to be too tense yourself as your dog may pick up on this and feel he needs to protect you. Allow the dogs to inspect each other in their own time. Make encouraging noises quietly and let them off their leads as soon as it is safe to do so. If introducing a dog and bitch, do not be too worried if the bitch resents the dog's over-boisterous advances and gives him what looks like a really good hiding! This is usually much less dangerous

than it sounds and serves as a warning to the dog not to take liberties with a lady - something which he is very likely to do if given half a chance. He will understand this quite quickly, and if he is a bit slow in getting the message she will put him very firmly in his place until he does. He will not mind this in the least and will probably like her all the more for it.

PUPPIES

It is a common mistake to allow a puppy to do what it likes to the older dog and then tell off the older dog for growling. In the wild a puppy would be rebuked for naughty or inappropriate behaviour and so it would learn pack manners. A puppy who never learns manners or not to bite too hard becomes an objectionable adult. You also increase the chances of fighting as the puppy gets older if you do not teach it some respect. If your adult dog tells off the puppy, you must also tell off the puppy and make a fuss of the older dog.

TOP DOG

If you do for whatever reason decide to adopt a same sex dog you must make a decision as to which is the top dog. Owners in general find this very difficult as most of us feel it is only right and fair to treat our children and our animals equally. This is unheard of in dog society and when introducing same sex adult dogs it is imperative that your whole family accepts that one is top dog and behave accordingly if trouble is to be avoided. When you get a second adult it may take some time to be sure who is naturally more dominant. As a general rule the existing dog is the top dog but you may have to revise this in time as the dogs settle in together, but it is the right way to start. In principle, reinforcing the Top Dog's position is easy - he comes first. In practice this means always feeding, greeting, grooming and giving treats to Top Dog before the other. Feeding in the correct order is especially important. Nothing means more to a dog than food and who gets it first. Make sure that the Top Dog always goes through doorways first and gets in and out of the car first. If you are haphazard with who gets what first, your dogs will have to fight to sort it out. There can be some very serious fights between dogs trying to be leader and they don't get better in time unless one dog gives in or gets badly hurt. It can be easy choosing your Top Dog if one has a naturally dominant personality but if your dogs appear to be evenly matched and both are pressing for top dog then you will just have to choose one. This is not unfair: dogs are much happier knowing who is who and where they fit it. It is their natural way of living, and human considerations of fair play are completely alien to them. However both dogs may be easygoing and live together quite happily. Do not ignore the first warning signs of trouble. Keep an eye on any lip curling and grumbling and put a stop to it. Do not leave new dogs together alone until you are absolutely certain that they are safe. If there is a minor disagreement it is better to reinforce the pack structure by telling off the bottom dog, no matter how unfair this seems. Tossing scraps onto the floor is just asking for trouble. Dogs diving together after food are bound to fight about it. Give scraps directly to your dogs in order of dominance, and say their names as you hand it over.

DOGS AND CHILDREN

Boxers have the reputation of being one of the best breeds to take into a home which also contains children, and it is very rare indeed for a Boxer to resent the presence of a young child. However sometimes there are issues but a bit of planning and common sense will often be all that is needed.

First and foremost couples hoping to start a family in the very near future should seriously consider whether this is the right time to get a Boxer, and certainly when a pregnancy is confirmed a couple should definitely reconsider. You will have enough on your plates with the birth and new baby, and if both parents are working do you really have time to spend with a large and boisterous dog? Leave it until the baby is a bit older and/or perhaps one parent is working part time.

If at that stage you wish to acquire a Boxer consider a bitch and perhaps an older one. Bitches in the Boxer breed tend to be smaller with a finer build, and in general "softer" and less likely to need a strong hand regarding discipline and training. Spaying is easy and relatively inexpensive, and can be done from before her first birthday. Debate still continues as to whether a bitch should have a "first season" before spaying.

Take advice from your vet but remember you run the risk of unwanted puppies so think carefully about how secure your home and garden is before deciding to let her have a heat.

Boxer rescues frequently accept Boxers for re-homing because it has growled at a child and the owners feel "that they dare not now trust the dog". Whilst growling in such circumstances should never be ignored, an element of common sense should prevail. If a child is constantly playing with the dog, climbing all over it, pulling his ears, etc. there comes a time when even the most placid of dogs will say in the only way he knows how "Please don't do that any more - I've had enough." As parents of the child, and owner of the dog, you have a duty to honestly assess the situation and if you feel that the dog has a point, then it is up to you to teach the children that your Boxer has as much right to peace and a little privacy as any other member of your family.

A dog is not a living toy which is required to put up with almost any kind of treatment the children hand out to him, although it has to be said that many Boxers do which is why they have such an excellent reputation with children.

Before you panic, therefore, sit back and think of the size of a Boxer's mouth, the agility and accuracy with which he can catch a ball, and ask yourself why, if he had intended to damage your child, he did not do so. In most cases the chances are that he was only politely asking the child to stop whatever he was doing.

It is always very important that your dog has somewhere he can go when he is feeling sleepy or fed up to rest and recharge his batteries. He should have somewhere he can go where he can depend on peace and quiet if he feels the need, and children should never disturb him when he has retreated to this sanctuary.

BABIES

We frequently have Boxers handed to us because there is a new baby in the family and the parents are naturally rather over-protective in the early days and feel that the new baby and the dog should be kept apart. Whilst understandable, they need not worry too much about the two living happily together providing they handle the situation sensibly. Look at it from the dog's point of view. Up until a few days ago he thought he was the apple of his owners eyes, was cuddled, taken for walks and allowed to go anywhere in the house he wanted to. Now there is this strange, noisy, creature in his home which is clearly not a threat to him as it is so small, but which his owners spend all their time looking at and holding and pushing him away, or worse locking him outside. The more you push him away the more frustrated he will get and the situation gets out of hand. Add to this, post natal depression, broken sleep at nights, anxiety due to inexperience at dealing with a new baby, and all too often the decision is to part with the dog, which hasn't really done anything wrong at all. The owners are deprived of the dog's love and companionship and the baby is deprived of one of the best dogs in the world with which to share its childhood. Many, many a child has learned to walk whilst holding on to their beloved Boxer for security, and curled up beside him for a quick nap.

If your Boxer is well established in your household then it is vitally important that as soon as a pregnancy is confirmed you assess where your Boxer "hangs out" in the house itself. Does he have the run of the place? Does he sleep in your bed or is allowed on the sofa or in the living room at night? Where are his bowls and toys kept? Review your household as if a baby has now arrived and assess whether the dog's household arrangements would still be suitable. Move his bed into the kitchen, and then a utility room perhaps, with his bowls and toys. Don't let him in the living room with you at night either at all or after a certain time – he will protest but get used to it. Purchase a stair gate and prevent him from roaming around upstairs. If he doesn't normally wear a collar get him used to one from here on in so that you have a way of controlling the dog by holding his collar when the baby arrives. It is also a good idea to purchase a good size collapsible dog cage at this time, place it in the corner of the kitchen or somewhere in the middle of things, and get your dog used to sleeping in it for short periods during the day in advance of the baby's arrival. It is important this is all done well before the baby arrives i.e. at least 2 months so he does not associate his loss of privileges with the new baby.

Before the baby is born let the dog sniff and thoroughly examine all the new furniture, toys etc. that you bring into the home. After the birth, but before Mum comes home, let him sniff and examine a dirty nappy which you have thoughtfully brought home for him!!! This will accustom him to the smell of the new arrival and seeing the baby for the first time will not be such a shock.

Take the first quiet opportunity to put a clean blanket on the floor and place the baby on it. Slip on a lead and let your dog sniff him from head to toe in a controlled way. He will be fascinated but providing you are quiet, calm and encouraging the baby will come to no harm whatsoever and the dog's curiosity will be largely overcome. You will be amazed at how gentle your big clumsy Boxer will be. Needless to say, you will no doubt have wormed your dog well in advance of the birth and also made sure that he has undergone a safe, effective flea treatment. No harm will come to your baby from being sniffed over by your dog and the beginnings of a firm friendship will be laid.

Try to include your dog in as many activities as possible and a cage is very useful for this. It will be a great help to be able to close your dog off if you're changing a nappy or the baby is learning to crawl without the dog feeling banished all the time to the garden or the garage - rather like you would use a playpen to keep a child safe if you have to answer the phone or doorbell. Cages are not designed for keeping a dog in for long periods of time but they can greatly reduce the anxiety of the early days and months with sensible use. Let him watch you bath it, feed it and change it either under supervision or by doing it beside his cage where he can watch - but dispose of the dirty nappies carefully: a lot of Boxers like to make off with them! If he doesn't feel left out, your Boxer will give you no worries at all and will help you bring the baby up.