

Advice on dogs, life and love



Dear Dog Lady,

After I started dating my boyfriend eight months ago, he informed me that he shared joint custody of a beagle named Julie with his ex-girlfriend. This bothers me but I love everything else about him.

After they broke up, his ex was so angry she wouldn't let him see Julie for two months. He is now very cautious not to upset her. He even avoided telling her that he was dating me because he didn't want her to get mad and take away his dog privileges.

I am bothered by this but I have noticed that Julie also has a negative reaction to the arrangement. The switching normally occurs by one dropping Julie off at daycare and the other picking her up. Often times, when the dog comes home from day care, she is sick to her stomach and has diarrhea or throws up.

I have mentioned the custody arrangement to my boyfriend as a possible source of this. I have suggested he talk to his ex to make sure they feed Julie the same food but he doesn't seem to take it seriously. He thinks I am just upset about the situation in general. While I surely am, I have gotten to know the dog and I love her. I am genuinely concerned for her. How can I talk to him about this and get him to take me seriously?
—Anne

Anne, when an ex-couple shares custody of a dog, the arrangement must be spelled out contractually—the same as for a child in a divorce agreement. Your boyfriend and his ex have not done the hard work. They have a loose arrangement. Their slipshod deal hurts you and the dog.

Julie does suffer because your boyfriend and his ex have not agreed about what kind of food to feed her, what veterinarian to share for vaccinations, checkups, emergencies etc. Your BF and ex should be in contact about what dog accessories to transport between houses.

Dog Lady is very touched that you stick up for Julie. Continue to do this kindly and politely. You've grown to love the dog and you make a savvy diagnosis: her sour stomach is probably caused by constant changes in food. Gently lead your boyfriend around to the conclusion he needs a contract with his ex-girlfriend to care for the dog. Do not burn with jealousy

if they have to meet face-to-face to agree on terms. Encourage him. Your kindness and support will be the impetus he needs. Arguing with your boyfriend about his ex only pushes him further away from you. Continue harping on him and you become a shrew to be avoided instead of an understanding, cooler head he can count on. So drop your jealousy and antagonism—for your sake and for Julie.

Dear Dog Lady,

Mandy, age seven, is a rescue dog we got two weeks ago. She was abused by an alcoholic man and the main problem we are having now is that she Velcros herself to me and is having separation anxiety. I can't leave the house before she starts barking and whining. I have tried leaving and coming back many times using the "cue" words—"I'll be back." Loud noises make her jump.

Last week I left Mandy with my husband while I drove to an errand. He said after 20 minutes she jumped our deck fence down to the ground, which is quite high. She was gone for five hours until someone found her and brought her back. She tried escaping again today by opening the front door on her own.

I'm not sure whether to take her back to the shelter or continue trying. I do have multiple jobs and I can't stay home 24/7. She can come with me to some of my jobs, but not others. She does enjoy riding in the car. I have grown to love this dog. She is such a sweetie and knows her manners. I want to do what is best for her.
—Elise

Elise, Dog Lady hates to be the prig but it's important to remind you that you chose to adopt Mandy. You undertook this dog acquisition on your own, and you had your reasons for doing so while fully aware of your work schedule and your limitations. And you must be clearly cognizant that getting a dog is not like buying a sofa or a big-screen TV on sale. Dogs are living creatures. They do not come with directions or a warranty.

The best you owe Mandy is the opportunity for a good life. Walk her every day so she churns through a lot of her escapist energy. Sure, you work at multiple jobs, but think of how great you'll feel after a vigorous walk every morning. Invest in Mandy by buying her a wonderfully comfy dog bed. Place it in a secure area of the house so she has a special place to rest. Take 10 minutes a day to train Mandy in simple sit-and-stay exercises. Reward her with small yummies and praise her to the heavens. You train her so you can control her and so she trusts you.

The dog has lived a helter-skelter shelter life. Give her a break from her past. Treat her with respect and she will reward you with her loyalty and love.

Visit www.askdoglady.com to ask a question.