PAWS TO BE KIND | ADVICE FOR *new pet owners*

To help first-time pet owners acclimate to their pet parent roles, members of the **Coastal Virginia Veterinary Medical Association** offer these guidelines:

Cultivate a good relationship with your local general veterinarian.

Once you've welcomed your new pet to your home, schedule a first-time wellness exam with a veterinary clinic. This will provide a baseline record of your pet's overall health, making future appointments less lengthy. It will also save time should an emergency situation arise; your provider will already have a record of your pet.

Honor your appointments.

If you are running late or can't make your appointment, call ahead to let your veterinary provider know. It will free up the time slot so another patient can be seen.

Be a responsible pet owner.

Exercise your pet regularly; socialize them with people and other animals; feed them a healthy diet; pet proof your home and outside area to keep them safe and from running away; provide training; pick up after your pet, and give them a clean sleeping/living area; spay or neuter them as soon as they are old enough; and give them plenty of love!

Plan ahead for emergency care.

Set aside money now to cover emergency care. Consider a pet insurance plan; save funds in a bank account; or sign up for payment plans such as CareCredit, which allow qualifying pet owners to pay their veterinary bills over time.

Avoid emergency visits by taking these steps:

- Maintain regular veterinary wellness checkups to keep them in optimal health.
- Make sure your pets have an ID tag and/or microchip.
- Secure your pets in a crate or harness when driving.
- Closely supervise and manage any interaction between dogs that are unfamiliar with each other.
- Leash your dog when walking, and follow leash laws that are posted in public areas.
- Keep small toys, socks and other items away from puppies to avoid accidental swallowing.
- Recognize that certain breeds are prone to heritable diseases and conditions, and keep an eye out for related symptoms.