

**ALIVE &
THRIVING**
**Animal
Behavior
GUIDE**
FOR
ANIMAL SHELTERS



By Kelley Bollen, MS, CABC

Certified Animal Behavior Consultant

Shelter Behavior Specialist

Alive & Thriving Director

Kelley Bollen, MS, CABC is a Certified Animal Behavior Consultant with a master's degree in animal behavior who has worked in the field of companion animal behavior for over twenty years. She is the owner and principal consultant for Kelley Bollen Consulting, LLC - an animal behavior consulting business that provides behavioral consultations to both private pet owners and animal shelters.

Kelley is the Director of Humane Network's Alive & Thriving program which is geared to improve the behavioral health of shelter animals. She is also the instructor for the Shelter Behavioral Management Certificate Course offered through the University of the Pacific and an adjunct professor for the Center for Animals in Public Policy at Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University and lectures in both the shelter medicine and animal behavior courses. She also served on the Tufts Shelter Medicine Program's Academic Steering Committee for many years.

Kelley is the former Director of Behavior Programs for the Maddie's Shelter Medicine Program at Cornell University's College of Veterinary Medicine where she taught shelter medicine residents and interns as well as veterinary students about behavior as it relates to the shelter environment. In her previous position as the Behavior Manager for the Massachusetts SPCA she conducted published research on shelter dog behavior evaluations.

Kelley is a nationally recognized expert in the field of shelter animal behavioral care and consults with animal shelters across the country to help them create or improve comprehensive behavioral wellness programs. She also provides educational seminars to veterinarians, animal shelters and the pet owning public. She is an author of chapters and articles relating to animal behavior and is an invited speaker at national animal welfare conferences.



"I wrote this guide to help shelter staff and volunteers understand the behavioral aspects of caring for homeless animals in the stressful shelter environment. I hope that you learn from the guide and use that knowledge to improve the quality of life of all the cats and dogs in your care."

-KELLEY BOLLEN

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the Peggy W. Foundation for funding the production of this eBook guide and for her commitment to improving the lives of shelter animals. Peggy was a dog lover who shared her life with many canine companions. The world lost a wonderful soul when Peggy died in 2020.



Alive & Thriving is a specially designed training program for animal shelters. It aims to improve the welfare of the cats and dogs living in animal shelters by providing valuable training for the wonderful people who care for them. In addition to this guide, *Alive & Thriving* offers educational seminars and hands-on training for shelter staff and volunteers.

For more information about *Alive & Thriving*:
<https://www.humanenetwork.org/alive-thriving>

Copyright © 2022 Alive & Thriving, Kelley Bollen
All Rights Reserved.

About the Author	ii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Intake of Cats & Dogs into the Shelter	2
Chapter 2: Reading Cat & Dog Body Language	6
Chapter 3: Safe, Humane Handling of Cats & Dogs in the Shelter	23
Chapter 4: Stress Recognition & Reduction for Cats & Dogs in the Shelter	28
Chapter 5: Enrichment for Shelter Cats & Dogs	36
Chapter 6: Training Cats & Dogs in the Shelter	40
Chapter 7: Behavior Modification for Shelter Dogs.	47
Chapter 8: Adoptions	61
Conclusion	65
Appendix of Resources	66

Learning about animal behavior is imperative for anyone who has chosen to work in the field of animal welfare. Whether you are an Executive Director, a mid-level manager, a veterinarian, a veterinary technician, an animal care technician, or shelter volunteer, understanding animal behavior is essential to providing the most humane care to the animals in your facility and to keep yourself safe.

Approximately 6.4 million animals still enter U.S. shelters every year. While that number has declined over the last few decades, it is still an unacceptable number. Research tells us that the number one reason for banishment from the home (contributing to the stray animal numbers) and owner relinquishment to a shelter is behavioral issues. Additionally, the stressful shelter environment creates negative emotional states in the animals due to the confines of captivity and these negative emotional states can lead to problematic behavior. Whether an animal spends three days, three months, or

three years in an animal shelter their well-being is compromised by the experience. Animal shelters need to do everything possible to ensure the best behavioral care is provided to each and every animal throughout their stay.

This guide focuses on behavior as it applies to shelter animals. There are other important aspects of shelter animal care that are not included here, but that information can be found in other resources. For a more comprehensive review of shelter animal care, I suggest the *Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters* available online from The Association of Shelter Veterinarians. This guide is meant to provide shelter staff access to pertinent information about animal behavior as it relates to the shelter environment. For a more comprehensive look at this important subject, I suggest reviewing the textbooks *Animal Behavior for Shelter Veterinarians and Staff* – volume one (2015) and volume two (2022).

INTAKE OF CATS & DOGS INTO THE SHELTER

Approximately 6.4 million animals enter U.S. shelters every year and of those animals, two-thirds are picked up as stray and one-third are surrendered by their owners. In both cases, obtaining as much information about the animals as possible is imperative in order to responsibly care for them in the shelter and find homes for as many as possible.

STRAY ANIMAL INTAKE

Stray animals can be brought into the shelter by a member of the public, the local animal control department, or transfers from other shelters. In all cases, it is important to obtain as much behavioral information about the animal as possible from the party who captures and brings the animal to your shelter.

When a citizen brings a stray animal to your shelter, it is important to ask a few questions regarding their experience with the animal. This information can help you gain insight about the animal. Using a standard questionnaire to gather this information is helpful.

STRAY CAT INTAKE QUESTIONNAIRE

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

STRAY DOG INTAKE QUESTIONNAIRE

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

When a dog is picked up by an animal control officer it is important that the officer document the behavior of the dog during acquisition.

Although the dog's behavior during this stressful time may not reflect the dog's true nature or suitability for re-homing, the information can be helpful to ensure proper care is provided in the shelter. Additionally, if the dog has bitten a human, it is important for the officer to gather as much information about the bite(s) as possible. Standard report forms to record this information allows animal control officers to easily document the dog's behavior and bite history.

ANIMAL CONTROL FIELD OBSERVATION REPORT

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

ANIMAL CONTROL DOG BITE REPORT

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

OWNER-SURRENDERED ANIMAL INTAKE

The most important aspects of taking in an owner-relinquished animal are listed below:

1. Being able to respectfully communicate with the relinquishing party.
2. Knowing what questions to ask and how to ask them to get the most relevant information about the animal.
3. Knowing how to read cat and dog body language and safely handle that unknown animal as you take him/her from the owner for an intake exam and placement into a cage.

Communicating with the Relinquishing Party

Your behavior is significant when dealing with a relinquishing owner. Since your ultimate goal is to find a live outcome for the majority of the animals that come into your care, you must be able to converse with the relinquishing party in a calm professional manner. This will allow you to acquire the important information you need to serve your purpose of properly caring for and re-homing the animal. It is also important to be compassionate and non-judgmental during the intake process. Although it is easy to lose faith in the pet-owning public when you see so many people relinquishing their pets, you need to keep your own emotions out of the process. Making the person feel guilty will only cause them to put up normal human defense mechanisms and it will close off communication.

How you should act:

1. Be aware of your own body language
2. Be a good listener
3. Look people in the eye
4. Be polite
5. Keep your own emotions and attitudes in check
6. Do not pass judgement

Most people who surrender their animals to a shelter have thought about doing so for a long time. They may have tried to find an alternative to surrender but were unsuccessful. You should be thankful that they chose to surrender to your shelter rather than setting them free or giving them to an unknown person who may not provide the best care.

You must understand that most people who share their homes with dogs and cats do not understand their behavior and therefore, struggle with behaviors they find problematic, even if they are normal canine/feline behaviors. The majority of people do not know how to resolve behavioral issues and struggle to live with what they perceive as a problem pet.

Shelter intake staff might be able to help the owner keep their pet in the home if they have the knowledge to provide behavioral advice to address common problem behaviors. If the owner feels that they do not have a choice but to relinquish their pet, it is imperative that you acquire a thorough behavioral history on the animal. Because there is no better predictor of future behavior than past behavior, knowing how the animal behaved in his/her previous home is likely to tell us how he/she will behave in the next home.

The Surrender Intake Questionnaire

Shelter intake staff should have a comprehensive standardized questionnaire available to aid in the acquisition of a complete history on the animal. The ideal way to acquire this information is to interview the person in a conversational manner rather than simply handing them the form to fill out themselves. Managed intake, by way of scheduling appointments for relinquishment, is the best way to allow staff the time to appropriately interview the relinquishing party.

The intake questionnaires should gather detailed information about the behavior of the cat or dog. Important questions to ask for both cats and dogs include the pet's basic personality, routine, experience at the veterinarian, experience with children, tolerance of humans, and tolerance of other animals. Additionally, for cats, there should be questions about their scratching and litter box habits. For dogs, questions about their housetraining status, their propensity for predatory behavior, their ability to be left home alone, and their degree of training are also important.

The surrender intake questionnaire should contain questions asked in a way to ensure a thorough answer. First, and most important, is that the questionnaire contains open-ended questions that require the

relinquishing party to articulate an answer. For example, you can ask *"What does your dog do when someone knocks on the door?"* Another technique is to ask questions as if you expect the animal to have certain issues. This will encourage the relinquisher to be honest. For example, say *"All dogs become annoyed and irritated at times. When does your dog become irritated?"*

When asking questions to gather information about a dog's propensity to exhibit aggressive behavior in certain situations, it is helpful to make a statement first that makes it clear that aggressive behavior in many situations is normal dog communication. For example, *"Dogs use particular actions to let people know when they are uncomfortable with someone or something. These warning behaviors are normal dog communication."* Then ask open-ended questions such as *"Under what circumstances has your dog growled at you or someone else?"*

If the relinquishing party indicates during the intake questionnaire that the dog has nipped or bitten a person in the past, an additional questionnaire must be used to attain details of that incident. It is good to include *nipping* in this situation because many people label a non-broken skin bite a *nip*. Additionally, most people don't want to disclose that their dog has bitten in the past

for fear that the dog will be euthanized so they often use the term *nip* in hopes that it doesn't sound as serious.

A completed surrender intake questionnaire for each animal will help you provide the best quality care and future placement. The answers to the questions will help you know if the animal has any behavioral challenges that require consideration at the shelter as well as in the adoptive home. The information can also help you decide what type of home might be most suitable and allow you to conduct appropriate adoption counseling to ensure the best possible outcome for the animal and the adopter.

CAT SURRENDER INTAKE QUESTIONNAIRE

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

DOG SURRENDER INTAKE QUESTIONNAIRE

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

DOG BITE HISTORY QUESTIONNAIRE

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

READING CAT & DOG BODY LANGUAGE

Dogs and cats use specific body postures and signals to communicate with members of their own species. They also use this *language* to communicate with humans but unfortunately, many people do not understand how to interpret what the animals are *saying*. It is imperative that anyone who is working in an animal shelter learn how to read and interpret cat and dog body language. Reading body language allows you to know how the animal is feeling at any given moment, will guide your handling decisions, and will help to keep you safe.

FELINE BODY LANGUAGE

The domestic cat (*felis catus*) evolved from the Middle Eastern wildcat (*felis sylvestris*). Unlike dogs, however, domestication has not changed the physical or behavioral characteristics of the cat. The domestic cat still retains all of the instincts and behaviors of their wild predecessors. In particular, the domestic cat is still a true predator, unlike the domestic dog. Although cats are predators, they are also a prey species, vulnerable to being hunted by other predators. As a prey species, cats are equipped to sense and avoid danger and are hardwired for escape and defense. As a result, they possess a heightened flight-or-fight response meaning that when frightened, they trigger

to this survival response more quickly than dogs. Cats also have the ability to conserve and then explode with energy when in a scary or stressful situation. These facts are important when working with cats in the shelter because when confined to a cage, a scared cat can trigger to aggressive behavior (fight response) because their ability to flee the scary situation has been taken away from them.

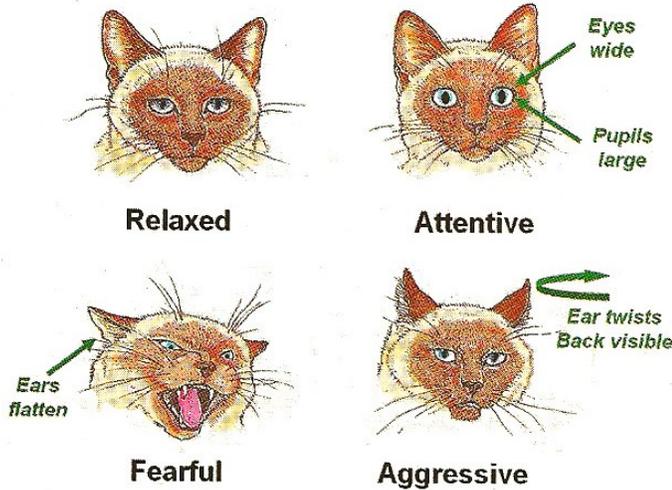
In addition to the flight or fight response, cats can also exhibit the freeze response when frightened. This is when they become completely immobile or catatonic. The important thing to remember about cats who are frozen in fear is that at any given moment they can trigger to either flight or fight in a split second. All of this makes being able to read a cat's body language extremely important to keep yourself and the cat safe.

Ears

Cats use their ears like sonar scanners when hunting prey, but they also use their ears for communication. It is important to learn what the different ear positions mean so that you know how the cat is feeling. Figure 1 shows what *message* the different ear positions are conveying.

FIGURE 1

Cat ear positions and their meaning



Laura Hartman Maestro – copyright 2000



Whiskers

A cat's whiskers are not just pretty hairs on their face, they are important sensory hairs that help cats navigate their environment. These sensory hairs, also called tactile vibrissae, are two to three times thicker than

regular cat hair and their roots go three times deeper than other hairs. Whiskers send messages to the brain and help the cat detect objects and negotiate through space. Whiskers are found on either side of their muzzle (mystacial whiskers), above their eyes, near their ears, and on the back of their forelegs.

The mystacial whiskers can also give you some insight as to the emotional state of the cat. When these whiskers are pointed forward and fanned out the cat is alert and trying to detect things in the environment. When a cat is frightened, their mystacial whiskers will be flattened against the face as the cat tries to look as small and inconspicuous as possible. This flattening of the whiskers against the face also benefits the cat in frightening situations as these important sensory hairs are more protected in this position (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2

Cat whisker positions – fanned forward and pulled back



Eyes

The part of the eye that can help us determine the emotional state of the cat are the pupils. The pupils of a cat's eyes naturally change shape in response to light, just like ours do. In bright light, the pupil constricts (gets smaller) to let in less light and in low light the pupil dilates (gets bigger) to let in more light. The other time the pupils change shape is when the cat is feeling a strong emotion. When a cat is frightened the pupils will dilate and when a cat is angry the pupils will constrict (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3

Cat pupil shapes – dilated and constricted



Tail

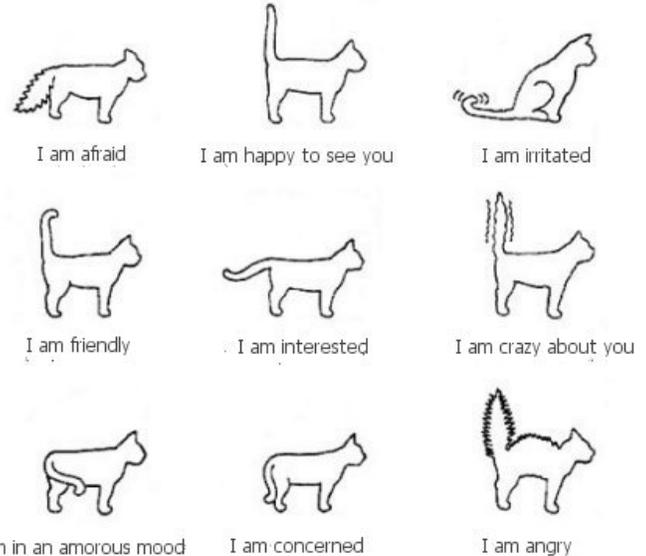
A cat's tail position can give you some insight into the cat's mood as well (Figure 4). A high vertical tail is typically a sign of friendliness while a tucked tail indicates fear. Additionally, the hair on the cat's tail can puff out (piloerection) when the cat is frightened or angry. This physiological response makes

the cat look bigger and may serve to intimidate and scare off a threat.

Movement of the tail also gives insight into their mood. When the tip of a cat's tail is twitching, it indicates that the cat is interested in something like when they see a bird outside of a window. When the tail is swishing from side to side, it indicates that the cat is irritated, and when the tail is violently swishing, it is an indication that the cat is annoyed or angry.

FIGURE 4

Cat tail positions and their meaning



Body Postures

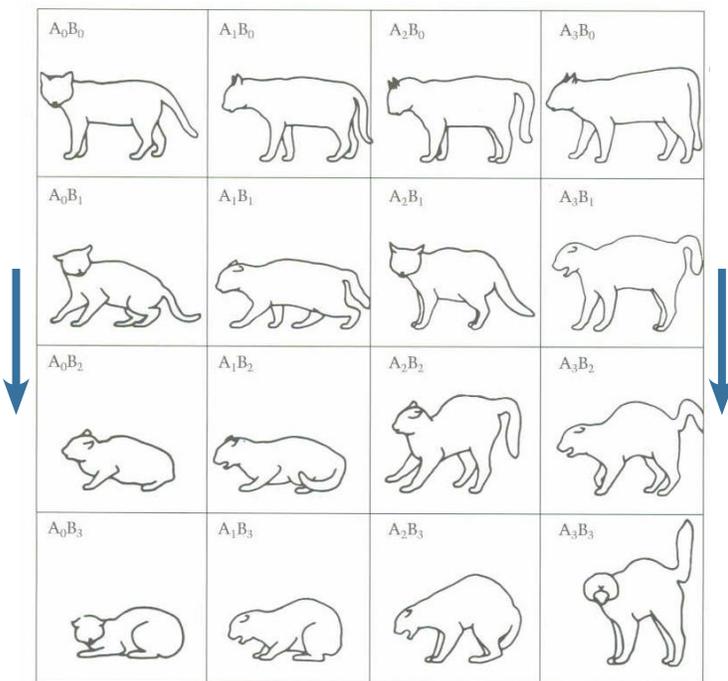
In addition to looking at individual body parts, the cat's body posture can provide some insight into the cat's emotional state.

Figure 5 shows the progression of the body posture changes as the cat's mood changes.

FIGURE 5

Cat body postures (Leyhausen, 1975)

Calm/relaxed → **Confident/assertive**



Fearful/withdrawn → **Mixed emotions**

The cat in Figure 6 has tense muscles, a head lower than the plane of the back, dilated pupils, whiskers fanned out and forward, and ears facing forward. The interpretation of this body language (unless this cat is ready to pounce on a prey item) is that the cat is alert but a little tentative and unsure. You can see the mix of body postures – the lowered head and dilated pupils indicate fear while the forward ears and whiskers

indicate alertness. It is important to look at the whole cat to interpret the cat's emotional state.

FIGURE 6 – Alert cat



The cat in Figure 7 has a tucked body, ears and whiskers pulled back, pupils dilated, and is hissing or spitting. Based on this body language we can interpret this cat's emotional state as fearful and that flight or fight is likely to be triggered if one reaches for the cat.

FIGURE 7 – Fearful cat



The cat in Figure 8 has tense muscles, ears rotated sideways, dilated pupils, an arched back, and piloerect hair along the back and tail. Based on this body language, we can interpret this cat's emotional state as fearful, but rather than trying to look small and inconspicuous, this cat is presenting as big as possible to scare away the threat.

FIGURE 8 – Fearful confident cat



The cat in Figure 9 has ears pinned back, dilated pupils, body weight leaning back, a forelimb in a position to strike, and is hissing or spitting. This cat is afraid and has triggered to the defensive fight response to scare the threat away.

FIGURE 9 – Fearfully defensive cat



Signs of a relaxed cat include a relaxed body with no muscle tension, normal size pupils,

and ears held in neutral position (Figure 10).

FIGURE 10 – Relaxed cat



Signs of discomfort and fear include muscle tension, limbs held close to the body, a lowered head, and dilated pupils (Figure 11).

FIGURE 11 – Uncomfortable cat



Signs that a cat might trigger to aggressive behavior (fight response) and may be dangerous to handle include dilated pupils, flattened ears, hissing, spitting, growling, and striking out with the front paws (Figure 12).

FIGURE 12 – Frightened cat



Cat Vocalizations

The meow is a vocalization that cats use as a request for something. While kittens meow to their mother requesting food, attention, or warmth, adult cats rarely meow to each other. The domestic cat has learned to tap into a kitten behavior to communicate with their human companions that they want something – food, attention, play, access to the outside, etc.

The purr is a sound that is produced as the vocal cords are vibrated by a set of special muscles. Cats will purr when they are happy and content, but they also purr when they are anxious or even when they are sick. So, you must look at the context of the situation to determine why the cat is purring. It is not always correct to assume that a purring cat is content.

Sounds labeled chirps, trills, and chirrups are sounds that cats make when they are excited, playing, or want attention.

Yowling is a vocalization made by females when they are in heat, by tom cats when they are battling with other males, and when the cat is in distress. In the shelter environment, it is important to attend to a yowling cat as he/she may be in distress.

Chattering is a vocalization that cats make when they are triggered to predatory arousal by the sight of a prey animal. This vocalization indicates excited anticipatory arousal.

The growl, hiss, and spit are sounds that cats make when they are annoyed, frightened, or angry.

READING CAT BODY LANGUAGE

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

CANINE BODY LANGUAGE

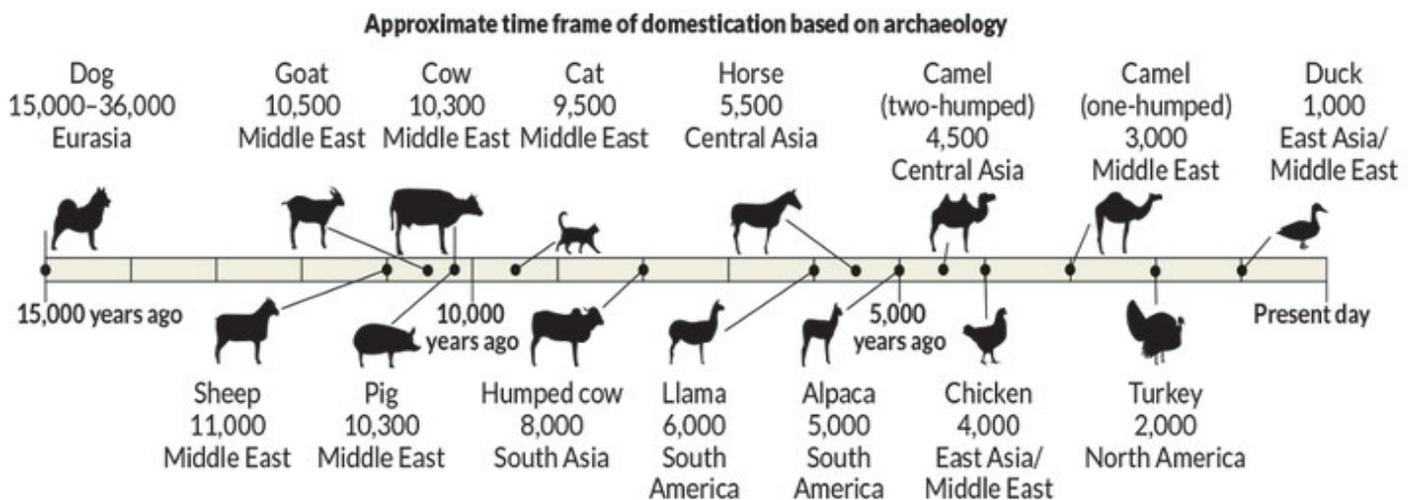
The domestic dog (*Canis lupus familiaris*) evolved from the grey wolf (*Canis lupus*). The dog was the first animal, and the only large carnivore, to be domesticated. In fact, they are the only animal to undergo domestication when humans were still nomadic hunter-gatherers 15,000-36,000 years ago (Figure 13). In a real sense, the dog actually domesticated itself. The most accepted theory of domestication is that some wolves started scavenging in the waste piles created by early humans, and these wolves and their offspring eventually moved closer and closer to the human villages until they were living among them and helping our ancestors.

Learning to read dog body language is a critical part of being confident and competent

when interacting with and handling shelter dogs. It is also important to understand what body postures and gestures mean in *dog speak* to prevent sending the wrong message to the dog. Because dogs are a social obligate species (needing social companionship to be emotionally healthy) just like we are, they have learned over the thousands of years living with us how to read our body language. In fact, dogs read our body language better than chimpanzees, our closest relative. This is due to the simple fact that dogs live with humans, while chimpanzees do not. Dogs are always paying attention to our bodies – watching for our intention movements. Simply shifting your body weight back or forward slightly speaks volumes to dogs.

When interpreting dog body language, you need to look at the position of the individual

FIGURE 13 – Approximate time frame of domestication based on archeology

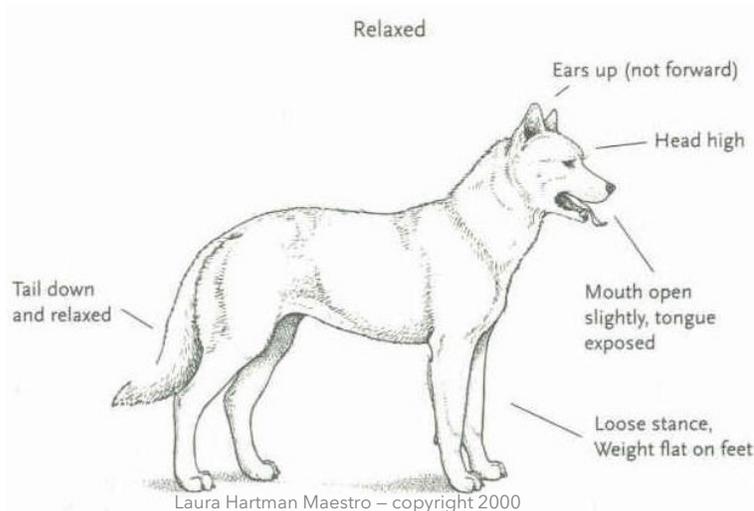


Taming the wild, sources: D.E. MacHugh et al/Annu. Rev. Anim. Biosci. 2017; M. Germonpré et al/J. Archaeol. Sci. 2009

body parts as well as the dog's body posture. All of the black and white figures that follow in this chapter were taken from the book *How to Speak Dog* by Dr. Stanley Coren, an excellent guide to learn about dog body language.

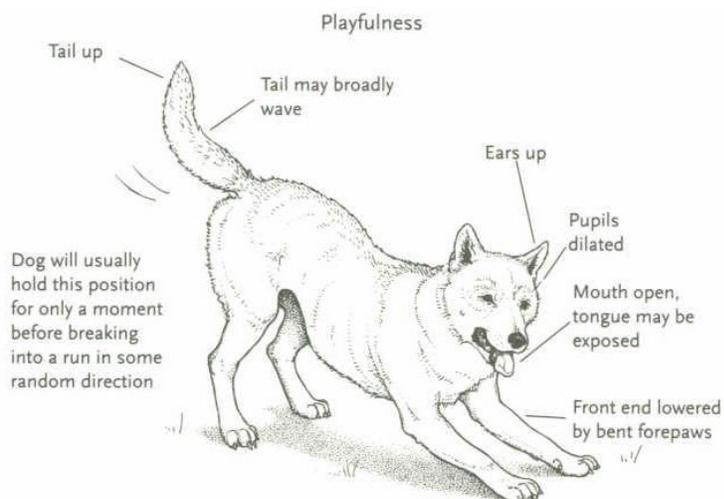
Figure 14 shows a relaxed dog. Notice that there is no tension in the muscles, the dog has even weight distribution on all four paws, the tail is held low and is relaxed, the ears are neutral, and the mouth is open and relaxed.

FIGURE 14 – Relaxed dog



The dog in Figure 15 is exhibiting a play bow. The play bow is a position that dogs use to initiate play with another being. It is also exhibited during play with other dogs to communicate with the playmate that play is continuing regardless of the dog's next move, which could be interpreted as aggression had the dog not communicated otherwise. Notice the front end is down while the back end is up, the tail is up and broadly wagging, and the face is relaxed yet excited.

FIGURE 15 – Play bow



Dog will usually hold this position for only a moment before breaking into a run in some random direction

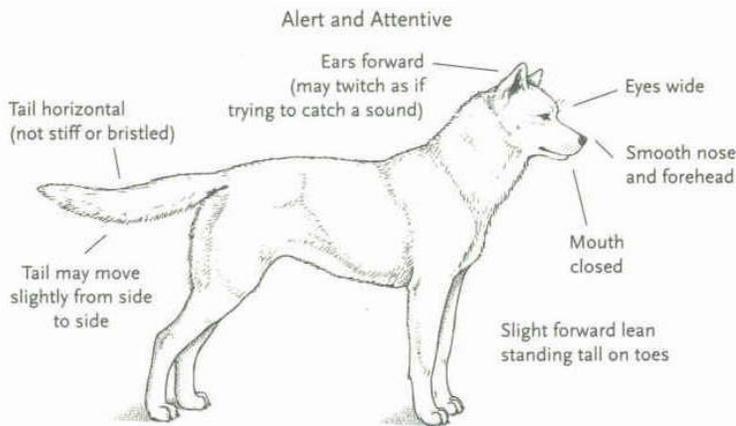
Laura Hartman Maestro – copyright 2000



Reading Cat & Dog Body Language

The dog in Figure 16 is alert and attentive. Notice the stiff body, the tail even with the plane of the back, the ears and eyes focused forward, and the mouth closed.

FIGURE 16 – Alert dog



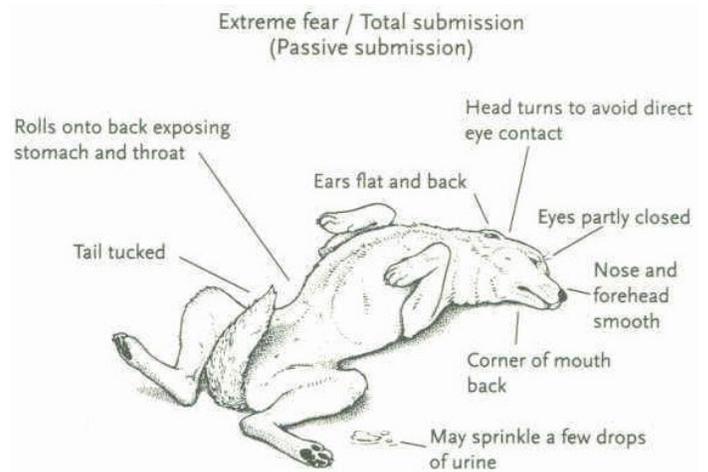
Laura Hartman Maestro – copyright 2000



The dog in Figure 17 is displaying passive appeasement. Appeasement signals are displayed when the dog feels threatened or overwhelmed by a social encounter. Notice the exposed belly, the tucked tail, the ears

pulled back, the eyes partially closed, and the mouth closed with the corners (commissures) pulled back. The dog may even dribble some urine as the urinary sphincter can loosen when a dog is anxious.

FIGURE 17 – Passive Appeasement



Laura Hartman Maestro – copyright 2000

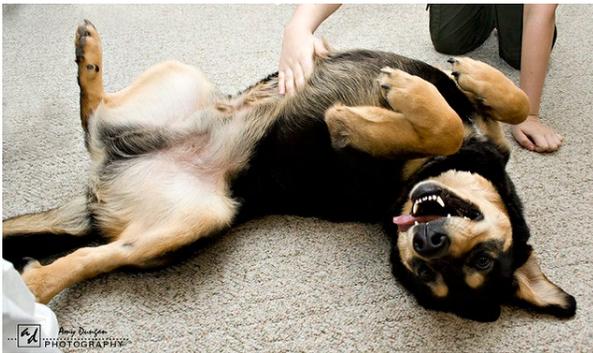


While many interpret an exposed belly to be in invitation for a belly rub, this is not the case with the dog in Figure 17.

Reading Cat & Dog Body Language

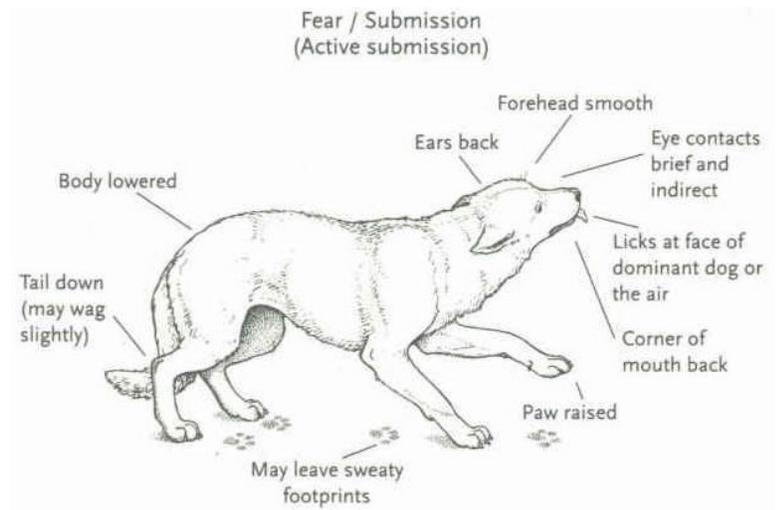
Figure 18 shows dogs inviting a belly rub. Notice the relaxed body and face and the loose openness of the limbs.

FIGURE 18 – Request for belly rub



The dog in Figure 19 is exhibiting active appeasement. This dog also feels threatened or overwhelmed by a social encounter. Notice the lowered body posture, the low tail, the ears pinned back, the mouth closed with the commissures pulled back, the tongue flicking out, and the raised front paw. You may even see sweaty footprints depending on the floor surface as the only place dogs sweat is through their foot pads and dogs who are nervous can sweat just like people do when nervous.

FIGURE 19 – Active appeasement



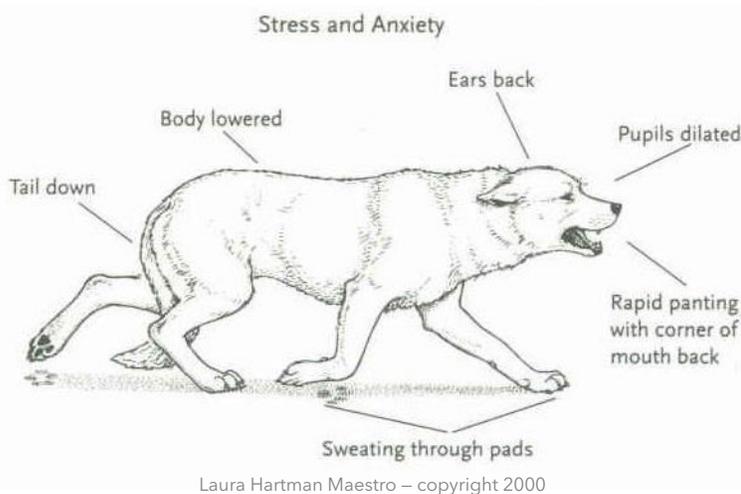
Laura Hartman Maestro – copyright 2000



Reading Cat & Dog Body Language

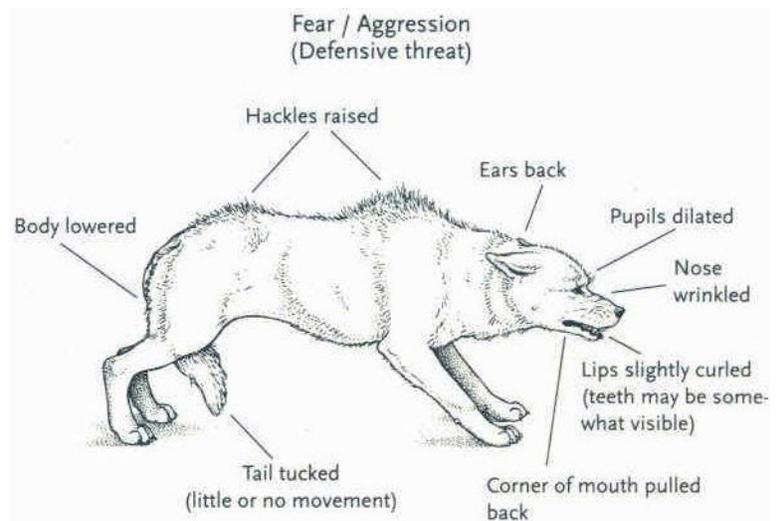
The dog in Figure 20 is exhibiting signs of stress and anxiety. Notice the lowered body, the tucked tail, the ears back, and sweaty footprints. Also notice that the mouth is open with the commissures pulled back and the dog is rapidly panting. The dog could be anxious about a social encounter or he/she may be anxious about an environmental stressor such as going into the veterinary office or animal shelter or when walking on slippery floor.

FIGURE 20 – Stress and anxiety



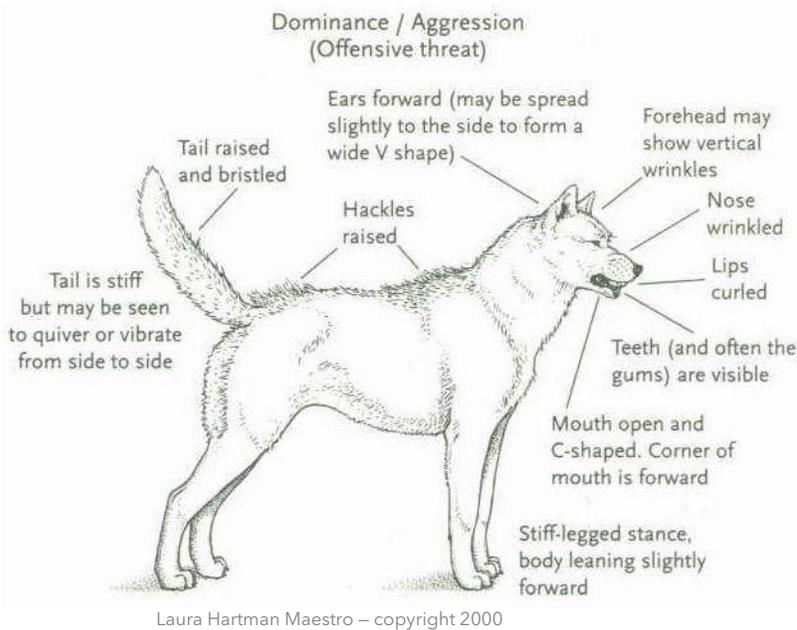
The dog in Figure 21 is exhibiting signs of fear and has triggered to defensive aggression (fight response). Notice the lowered body posture, the tucked tail, the lowered head, the ears back, the hackles raised (pilo-erection), and the commissures back while showing teeth. This dog is conflicted between using appeasement signals and aggressive signals to increase social distance.

FIGURE 21 – Defensive aggression



The dog in Figure 22 is exhibiting signs of offensive aggressive behavior. Notice the stiff body, the weight distribution forward, the high flagged tail, the raised hackles, the ears forward, and the commissures forwards while showing teeth.

FIGURE 22 – Offensive aggression



Ear Position

Figure 23 shows the changes in ear position based on the emotional state of the dog. The ears of a fearful dog are pulled back while the ears of an alert, aroused, or angry dog are held up high with the openings facing forward. Of course, this latter statement is only true for dogs with pricked ears. Dogs with floppy ears or cropped ears are harder to read based solely on their ear position.

FIGURE 23 – Ear positioning

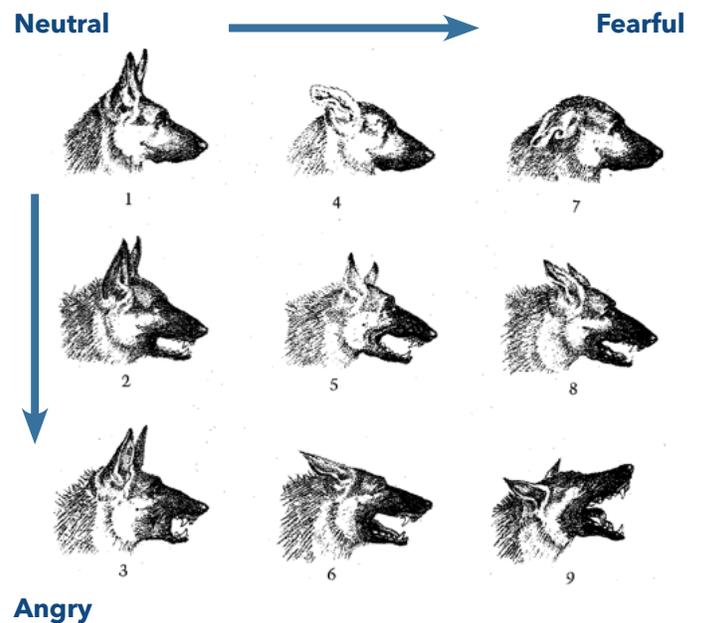


FIGURE 24 – Ear positions



Ears back

Ears held high, openings forward

Tail Position

The position of the tail can provide insight as to the emotional state of the dog. A tucked tail indicates fear while a high flagged tail indicates alertness or aggressive arousal (Figures 25 and 26). It is harder to read a dog's emotions based only on the tail when the dog has a naturally curly tail. And this appendage is useless to indicate a dog's emotional state for dogs born without a tail or when their tail has been docked.

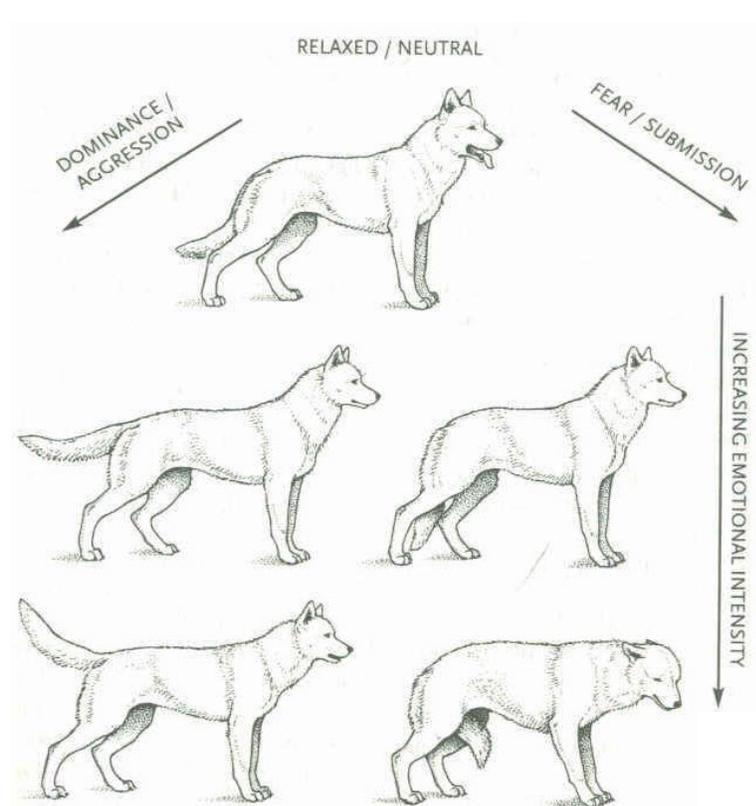
FIGURE 25 – Tail Positions



Tucked tail

High-flagged tail

FIGURE 26 – Tail Positions

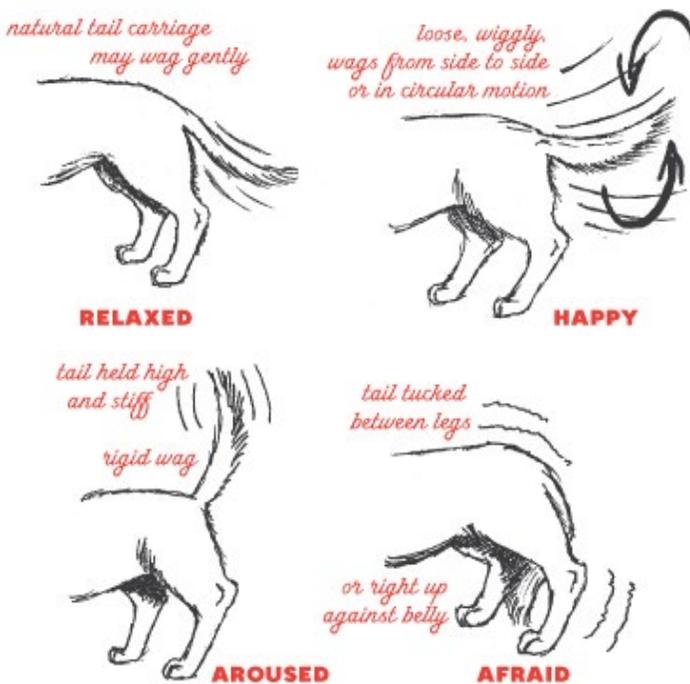


Laura Hartman Maestro – copyright 2000

Tail Movements

Dogs can wag their tails in many different situations and understanding how to interpret the tail wag is essential to being able to read the dog's emotional state. Generally speaking, if the tail is below the horizon of the back and wagging it is usually a friendly wag. But if the tail is at or above the horizon of the back and wagging, this only signifies arousal. This could be good arousal or bad arousal so reading other body language is important for proper interpretation. If the tail is high and flagged and stiffly wagging, this is usually aggressive arousal. The tail may even be wagging while tucked from fear (Figure 27).

FIGURE 27 – Tail movements



illustrations by ©DESIGN LAB CREATIVE STUDIO

Facial Expressions

When a dog is relaxed and in a positive emotional state there will be no muscle tension in the face, the eyes will be soft, and the ears neutral. When a dog is anxious there will be obvious tension in the face with a furrowed brow and tension around the eyes and mouth (Figure 28).

FIGURE 28 – Facial expressions



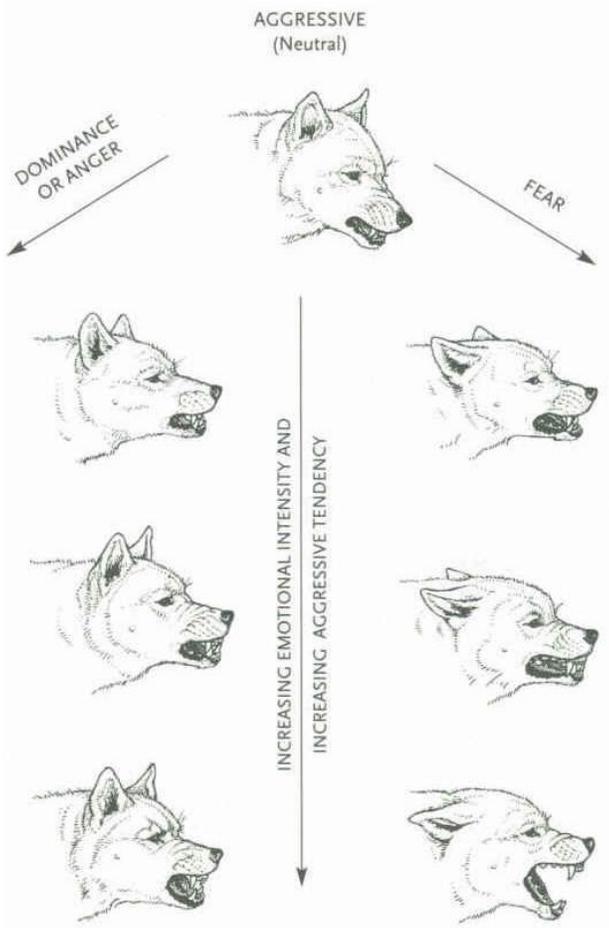
Relaxed, happy face

Worried tense face

Commissure Positions

When dogs are exhibiting defensive aggression signals (fear), the commissures of the mouth will be pulled back and most of the teeth will be showing (fear grimace). When dogs are exhibiting offensive aggression signals (anger), the commissures of the mouth will be pushed forward, and their front teeth will be visible (agonistic pucker) (Figures 29 and 30).

FIGURE 29 – Commissure Positions



Laura Hartman Maestro – copyright 2000

FIGURE 30 – Commissure positions



Fear grimace

Offensive pucker

Warning Signs

While snarling, growling, lunging, and snapping are obvious warning signs that the dog may be dangerous in that moment, there are other more subtle warning signs that the dog is uncomfortable and that extra care should be taken during interactions.

Eyes

When a dog gives direct eye contact with a stiff body, high tail, and closed mouth this indicates a threat or a challenge to the recipient. Dogs can also give a *hard stare* which involves the hardening of the muscles around the eyes during direct sustained eye contact. You will know when you receive a hard stare from a dog because your inner animal will read the seriousness of the warning and your sympathetic nervous system will trigger your flight or fight response and cause your heart to pound, your palms to get sweaty, and the hair on the back of your

neck to go up. You must take a hard stare very seriously.

Other things to look for in the eyes are dilated pupils which indicate the emotions of fear or anger. Dogs also exhibit an eye position termed *whale eye* or *half-moon eye* that indicates discomfort with an interaction. The *whale eye* occurs when the dog's head moves but their eyes do not, or when the dog's eyes move but the head does not. Figure 31 shows dilated pupils and whale eye. Figure 31 shows dilated pupils and whale eye.

FIGURE 31 – Eye signals



Dilated pupils

Whale eye

Displacement Behaviors

Displacement behaviors are signs of stress and anxiety. These behaviors can be normal behaviors done out of context. For example, dogs yawn when tired just like people do. But dogs also yawn when they are anxious

and stressed. Other displacement signals include lip licking, tongue flicking, blinking, shaking off, scratching, and sniffing the ground.

Avoidance Behaviors

Dogs also show avoidance behaviors when they are uncomfortable. They will turn their head to face away from the other being, turn their whole body away, or leave the scene entirely.

Responses to Fear

Dogs, like cats, can trigger to the flight, fight, or freeze responses. Dogs can also show what is termed the fidget response when they are anxious or afraid. Dogs exhibiting the fidget response are constantly moving or acting fidgety. This response is often mis-interpreted as the dog being *bratty* or uncooperative.

Other signs of fear in dogs include trembling, sweaty paws, shedding hair coat, shedding dander, panting, salivating, and involuntary urination or defecation.

CONCLUSION

When you are trying to read an animal's body language and signaling to determine their emotional state, you must look at the individual body parts as well as the animal as a whole. You also need to look at the context of the situation at the time. Dogs and cats can exhibit mixed signals because of feeling mixed emotions. A conflicted animal can look defensive one moment and offensive the next. Putting everything together will give you a better indication as to how the animal feels and how you should interact with that animal.

READING DOG BODY LANGUAGE

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

SAFE, HUMANE HANDLING OF CATS & DOGS IN THE SHELTER

HANDLING SHELTER CATS

It is important to recognize that the shelter cats may be frightened and when in this emotional state, can trigger to aggressive behavior (fight response) quickly. It is imperative to go slowly with cats and to let them get used to your presence before interacting with them.

Greeting a Caged Cat

Approach the cage and make sure the cat knows you are there by talking softly. Open the door slowly and continue speaking to the cat in a soft, pleasant voice. A slow blink directed at the cat can help relay to the cat that you are not a threat (this is a signal that cats give to other cats and humans in this context). Then offer the *finger-tip hello* whereby you offer your fingertip for the cat to sniff. This gesture simulates the way cats greet each other as they often start with a nose-to-nose sniff. Since your fingertip is about the size of a cat's nose, this gesture allows the cat to sniff you without feeling threatened. Then you can pet gently under the cat's chin or behind the ears for a few seconds before attempting to pick the cat up. While cats do love their heads to be petted, reaching over their head initially can cause the cat to become frightened.

Taking a Cat Out of the Cage

It is critically important that you greet the cat properly as described above before attempting to pick up the cat for removal from the cage. Before you pick up the cat, it is best to gently turn the cat's body so that you can pull him/her from the cage back-end first. This will be less threatening to the cat and will prevent you from being harmed by the cat should the cat startle during the process. Remember, the most dangerous weapons (teeth and claws) are on the front end of the cat. Make sure to support the cat's body well as you lift the cat up and out of the cage and carry him/her wherever you are heading.

If the cat appears frightened before you attempt to remove him/her from the cage or if the cat has already triggered to the fight response and is exhibiting aggressive behavior, you should consider using a tool to assist you. If you simply need to move the cat from one place to another, the best course of action is to place a box into the cage and leave the cat alone for a while. A scared cat will most likely go inside the box to hide. Then you can simply cover the opening of the box and move it with the cat inside to the next location, leaving the box with the cat still inside in the new location.

If you must handle a scared cat, a large, thick towel can be helpful as long as the cat has not triggered to aggressive behavior. Covering the cat gently with a towel can help to keep the cat calm as he/she will feel hidden and more secure under the towel.

Catching a Loose Cat in the Room

If you must catch a cat that got loose in the room, you may need to use a tool depending on the cat's behavior. Sometimes you may be able to simply pick up the cat and put him/her back into the cage. But if the cat is afraid, you may need to use a towel, a box, gloves, or a net, depending on the cat's behavior. If the cat looks frightened but is not acting aggressively, a towel gently draped over the cat and used to pick the cat up might be sufficient. But if the cat is acting aggressively, a box, cat handling gloves, or a net might be needed. Do NOT use a catch pole on a cat – this is inhumane handling of a cat.

If you need to use a net to catch the cat, do not chase the cat around the room trying to catch him/her. Wait until the cat is stationary and slowly approach and gently place the net over the cat. Once the cat is covered by the net, pull the net slowly towards you so that the cat will back up into the pocket of

the net, then close the opening, cover the net with a towel, and carry the cat inside the net to the cage.

If the cat is hiding in a place that doesn't allow you to use the above-mentioned tools, bait, set and cover a cat trap and leave it in the room overnight. Once the cat is in the trap, you can transfer the cat to a feral den to be placed back into the cage. To make that transfer, position the opening of the trap next to the opening of a covered feral den, uncover the trap and the cat should move into the space that looks safer (Figure 32).

FIGURE 32 – Set-up to transfer a cat from a trap to a feral den for transport



Handling Cats in the Shelter

Cats can be more difficult to handle and restrain than dogs because in general, cats are less socialized to handling than dogs. But mostly, this is due to the fact that as a prey species cats feel very vulnerable when restrained. It is imperative that you move slowly when handling cats and use gentle restraint. Cats detest being over-restrained and doing so usually triggers the flight or fight response. Sometimes a towel wrap can help keep the cat calm during handling procedures. Dr. Sophia Yin developed many different towel wraps to use during cat handling in the veterinary office. These same techniques are useful in the shelter. Instructional resources are available on www.drSophiaYin.com to help you learn these towel techniques.

Scruffing a cat used to be the only technique taught in veterinary schools and animal shelters before the innovative teachings of

Dr. Yin. The thought was that since kittens go limp when their mother scruffs them, the same must be true when one scruffs a cat. But cats outgrow this kitten reflex and scruffing an adult cat can cause extreme stress and may trigger the flight, fight, or freeze response. So, use scruffing only when needed, and when you do scruff a cat, scruff loosely with one hand and use the other hand to support the cat's body weight. Then be ready to scruff more firmly if needed. It is inhumane to give a cat a *death grip* during scruffing and even more inhumane to dangle a cat by the scruff of the neck. It is important to remember that cats kill and are killed with neck bites, so this is how they may interpret being grabbed harshly by the scruff of the neck, especially in a scary environment like the shelter.

**SAFE, HUMANE HANDLING
OF SHELTER CATS**

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

HANDLING SHELTER DOGS

Many human behaviors elicit fear in dogs, and it is important to understand what these behaviors are so that you don't inadvertently frighten a dog. Giving the dog direct eye contact, positioning your body so that you are frontally facing the dog, leaning over the dog, reaching quickly towards the dog, reaching over the dog's head, making any fast/jerky movements in their direction, and using a harsh voice are all human actions that can elicit fear in dogs. Knowing that all these things can frighten dogs, make sure to let the dog get used to your presence before you attempt to interact, move slowly and smoothly, stand or squat sideways, make no direct eye contact, and talk in a calm friendly voice. It is always best to let the dog approach you and if he/she does, offer your hand to sniff and then reach and pet under the dog's chin or behind the ears – not over the head. Make sure to breathe normally when interacting with a dog because when you hold your breath, you are stiff and the dog may interpret this as a threatening gesture. If the dog does not approach you, toss some treats to see if that helps build their trust.

Taking a Dog Out of a Kennel

It is never advisable to go into a kennel with a dog that you do not know and who has not been fully behaviorally vetted. When you

are closed inside a kennel with a dog, there is limited space for the dog and you. This could cause a dog to become fearful and possibly aggressive, and if this happens, you are trapped. To remove unknown dogs from a kennel, it is best to use a slip lead. Approach the kennel front with a sideways body posture and speak calmly to the dog. Then open the door partially, keeping a foot in place to prevent the dog from pushing it open. Hold the opening of the slip lead in the open space of the open kennel door, and usually, the dog will walk right into it.

If the dog is fearful and not approaching the front of the kennel, stand or squat sideways so that you are less threatening. Without giving direct eye contact, speak in a calm voice and toss some treats. Then you can slowly and smoothly move closer to the dog and gently place the slip lead over the dog's head.

If the dog growls, snarls, or snaps at you as you approach, the dog needs more time to trust you. If you do not have more time to spend building trust and you must get the dog out of the cage, you can gently toss the slip lead like a lasso around the dog's neck. If you can get the leash on using this method (it requires practice), make sure to open the kennel door wide once you have the lead on so that the dog can see an escape route.

Once out of the kennel, many dogs will feel safer and walk on the lead.

Putting a Dog Back into the Kennel

The same advice discussed above applies to putting the dog back into the kennel – do not go inside, closing the kennel door behind you to remove the lead from the dog. Walk the dog into the kennel and back yourself out as you take off the slip lead. If the dog is acting afraid or at all aggressively towards you while out on the lead, the double-leash method can be very helpful to get the dog safely back into the kennel without triggering a negative response. Connect the clip of a small leash to the ring of the slip lead that is on the dog. Then walk the dog into the kennel and close the door completely. Then pull the second leash which will open the noose of the slip lead and pull both leashes out of the kennel. This method allows you to safely get the dog back into the kennel without you being threatening or triggering a negative incident.

Emergency Leash Muzzle Procedures

There may be times when you need to pick up a dog that you have on leash. If you are at all nervous to do so based on the dog's

behavior, you can use the leash as a muzzle to do this safely. Wrap the leash around the dog's muzzle quickly several times and hold it behind the dog's head before picking the dog up.

There may be times when a dog that you have on the leash starts to act aggressively toward you. The procedure to stop an attack involves quickly straightening your arms and pulling up on the leash to essentially cut off the airway of the attacking dog. While this is not a pleasant thing to do to a dog, it can save you from serious harm. Once the dog has stopped the attack you can quickly get him/her into a cage or behind a door or you can have someone capture the dog with a catch pole.

Catching a Loose Dog that is Acting Aggressively

A catch pole can be used to capture a loose dog that is acting aggressively. It is critically important that you know how to use a catch pole before attempting to catch a dog with one.

**SAFE, HUMANE HANDLING
OF SHELTER DOGS**

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

STRESS RECOGNITION & REDUCTION FOR CATS & DOGS IN THE SHELTER

Cats and dogs experience all the basic emotions that we do – fear, anger, distress, frustration, excitement, affection, and joy. These emotions originate in the limbic system which is the emotional center of the brain. Because this is a primitive part of the brain, our limbic system is similar to that of other mammals. Where we differ is in the size and complexity of our cerebral cortex which is the thinking part of the brain. Because of our more complex brains, humans experience higher emotions than dogs and cats do, such as guilt and revenge.

Emotions are adaptive which means that they help an animal survive. Even the negative emotions, and maybe especially the negative emotions (fear, distress, anger, frustration), are adaptive because they cause the animal to change its behavior in order to escape or avoid current or future dangerous situations.

Fear is the emotion initiated when an animal perceives a stimulus that is interpreted as potentially harmful. Fear is essential for survival as it causes changes in the brain and organ function and ultimately, changes behavior. In particular, fear can trigger the flight or fight response. The flight response involves getting away from the scary thing and the fight response involves trying to make the scary thing go away.

Anxiety is the emotion caused by apprehensive anticipation of a potentially harmful event. The triggering event can be a real or perceived negative situation. While fear is the result of direct contact with the scary thing, anxiety is the anticipation of a scary thing.

Frustration is the emotion usually attributed to external factors that are beyond the animal's control. Frustration results from unfulfilled needs, unresolved problems, or blocked motivated behavior.

Anger is the emotion initiated when an animal's basic boundaries are violated. Animals can exhibit a vast range of intensities of anger just like humans, from being slightly irritated to being in an out-of-control rage.

The link between frustration and anger must be considered as well. Chronic (long term) frustration can lead to anger. We have all felt this in our life. When we are frustrated by something for a long duration of time, we can eventually start to feel angry about the frustrating situation.

Stress is basically a *catch-all* term. Stress can occur in any situation that makes the animal feel negative emotions (fear, frustration, anger). The causes of stress include novelty, uncertainty, anything startling (i.e. loud

noises), boredom, separation from social partners, unwanted interactions, and a loss of and continued lack of control. Unfortunately, all these things are inherently part of the shelter experience for the animals. Therefore, the shelter is a very stressful place.

Stress reduces welfare, increases susceptibility to illness, and increases the chance for the development of unwanted or problematic behaviors. That is why it is crucial for shelters to place a priority on programs that reduce stress and promote the physical and psychological well-being of the animals. Keeping the animals emotionally healthy is just as important as keeping them medically healthy. Additionally, it is the humane thing to do in our animal shelters.

Below is a list of the reasons why the shelter environment is so stressful for the animals:

- Abandonment
- Novel environment
- Confinement
- Isolation
- Confusion and frustration
- High-noise levels
- Sleep deprivation

- Sights, sounds, and smells of other animals
- Being handled by strangers
- Lack of control over the environment

There are individual differences when it comes to the level of stress an animal experiences as well as how each animal manifests stress. Individuals can exhibit diverse behavioral differences when experiencing similar physiological states.

All animals assess the environment based on feedback from the senses. It is important to understand that dogs and cats live in a different sensory world than we do and so their assessment of the environment may differ from our own. When it comes to the auditory sense, humans can hear up to 20 kilohertz, but cats can hear up to 80 kilohertz and dogs up to 60 kilohertz. This means that cats and dogs are hearing things in the shelter that we can't hear. Their olfactory sense is many times more sensitive than ours. Humans have 6 million scent receptors while cats have 200 million and dogs have 300 million. Their sense of smell is their most important sense, while ours is our vision. Cats and dogs also see differently than we do. Because of their long noses, dogs have poor close-up vision compared to humans. They also have poor binocular vision but better peripheral vision than we

do. A cat's vision is adapted to being a low-light predator. They can see in one-sixth the illumination needed by humans. They also have motion-sensitive vision so that they can see the slightest movement when hunting their prey.

Cats and dogs, and other mammals besides humans, have a specialized organ called the vomeronasal organ. The only purpose of this organ, which sits above the roof of the mouth, is to take in and analyze pheromones (species-specific chemical signals). While cats and dogs emit all kinds of pheromones, they also emit fear pheromones when afraid, and they can detect the fear pheromones of their conspecifics (animals of their own species) in the shelter. Research indicates that the fear pheromones of one animal can affect another. So, imagine how it is for the cats and dogs to be brought into the shelter environment that is filled with fear pheromones from the other animals.

CATS IN THE SHELTER ENVIRONMENT

Generally speaking, cats entering the shelter environment are likely to be stressed and afraid and have a hard time adapting. This is true for many reasons but mostly because they are trapped in a small cage where they have no control. Additionally, many cats that enter your shelter have never seen, smelled, or heard other cats to this intense degree, much less dogs.

How long it takes a cat to adjust to this stressful environment varies by individual. For some, a few days will be enough, but for others it can take several weeks, and others may never adapt to the shelter.

The factors that affect the stress response in individual cats include:

- Their genetic coping ability
- Their individual personality
- Their level of socialization during the critical period for socialization (three to seven weeks)
- Any prior experience or exposure to the stimuli they are experiencing
- The duration, severity, and predictability of the stressor
- Whether the stressor is escapable or not

Signs of stress in cats are listed below. It is important to be able to recognize these signs so that you can try to reduce the cat's stress level.

- Hiding
- Not eating
- Feigned sleep
- Lethargy
- Social withdrawal
- Hyper vigilance
- Aggressive behavior
- Panting
- Vocalizing
- Lack of or excessive grooming
- Disruption of the cage bedding
- Escape attempts
- Physical illness (diarrhea, etc.)
- Fearful body language (dilated pupils, piloerection, muscle tension, etc.)

Stress Reduction for Shelter Cats

Stress reduction procedures should start the moment the cat enters the facility. This means that ideally there is a separate intake area for cats (separate from dogs). If this is not possible at your shelter, make sure the incoming cats are inside a covered carrier and the carrier should not be placed on the floor.

The first experience the cat has with a human at the shelter should be a pleasant one or at least, not a scary one. While intake exams and vaccinations may be part of your intake procedure, take care to keep the animal calm using the humane handling techniques discussed in Chapter 3. The caregiver who puts the cat into the cage should be gentle and kind, offering calm petting and treats if the cat is receptive to these things.

Never house cats in the same room as dogs. The extent of exposure to dogs is the biggest factor affecting a cat's stress level in the shelter. While we may not be able to avoid exposure to the sound of dogs, making sure the cats cannot see dogs is critically important.

The most important strategy to reduce stress for shelter cats is that every single incoming cat **MUST** have the ability to hide from the very first second he/she is put into the cage. Hiding is the best coping strategy

cats have to deal with fear and stress. The inability to perform this species-typical coping behavior prolongs the stress response. A number of studies have shown that providing cats with a suitable place to hide significantly reduces behavioral measures of stress. Cats allowed to hide have lower stress levels, adapt more readily to the shelter, perform more natural behaviors, appear more friendly, display more relaxed behaviors, and are more likely to approach people. While a box inside the cage is the best option for the cats, if the cage is not big enough to accommodate an appropriate size box for the cat, hanging pillowcases or towels on the front of the cage will suffice.

While the box is excellent for hiding, providing a perch for the cat is also important. Cats like to be up high to survey their environment so a perch would also help reduce stress. An additional benefit of providing both a hiding place and a place to perch is that the cat has some choice in their tiny cage and choice gives even a caged cat a little sense of control. Cats spend most of the day sleeping or resting so providing them with soft comfortable bedding can also reduce stress.

Another important stress reducer for cats is to make sure that you keep things as familiar as possible. Cats do not like the unfamiliar and it can increase their stress level. Trying

to schedule the same caregivers to care for the cats daily, not moving them from cage to cage, and making sure that a familiar scent is always present are wonderful stress reduction strategies. Spot cleaning the cat cages, whereby you only clean the soiled items rather than removing everything and completely sanitizing the cage each day, has been the recommendation from the shelter veterinary association for over a decade. This practice helps maintain a familiar scent for the cats as all their bedding and toys will retain their scent.

Maintaining a predictable schedule also helps to reduce stress in the shelter cats. Cats do not like unpredictability so keeping the same daily routine for feeding time, cleaning time, play time, and petting time helps the cat adapt to the already unpredictable shelter environment.

The calming pheromone product called Feliway®, which is the synthetic version of the facial pheromones that cats emit when feeling calm, comfortable, and affiliative, is an excellent stress reduction product. Feliway® comes in plug-in diffusers that are good for small rooms and the spray version is good for providing individual stressed cats with this calming pheromone. Simply spray the Feliway® onto a washcloth or stuffed animal and place it into the cage.

Stress Recognition & Reduction for Cats & Dogs in the Shelter

Playing soft, soothing music has been shown to have a calming effect on animals, so putting a radio on a calming music station or playing a CD of calming music can help to reduce stress. It is best to keep the volume low (remember they hear way better than we do), play the music in one-hour intervals (with an hour break in between), and turn the music off completely at night.

Daily positive human contact is important for the wellbeing of socialized cats residing in an animal shelter. The consistency and predictability of the type of handling can also play a role in interaction success. Human caregivers should know to move slowly, give no direct eye contact, and use minimal restraint when interacting with the cats. Shelter cats with timid or shy personalities may benefit from consistent interactions with a familiar human caregiver. It is suggested that familiar caretakers provide several minutes of social interaction throughout the day for each cat in their care. The type of social interaction provided should be geared towards the preferences of each individual cat. While some cats seem to enjoy play, others may prefer gentle petting. Staff needs to be skilled at reading

body language so that they can adapt what types of interaction they offer based on the reaction of the cat.

Caregivers should also be considerate of the cat's acute hearing and sensitivity to vibration. The sound of slamming cage doors can be startling and frightening to the cats so efforts should be made to close doors gently. Loud raucous music can be frightening and irritating so the choice of music and the volume at which it is played should be considered. Additionally, placing radios on top of metal cages causes vibration that can increase stress levels in cats. Caregivers should also be mindful when carrying a cat in a carrier, keeping it held steady as not to cause the cat to bounce around inside as it is moved from one place to another.

Lastly, giving the caged cats time outside of their cage to stretch, play, and investigate can help to reduce stress. Cats can each spend a short period of time a few times each week in an office, real-life room, visiting room, or lobby (if safe).

**STRESS REDUCTION
FOR SHELTER CATS**

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

DOGS IN THE SHELTER ENVIRONMENT

The stressors for the shelter dogs include:

- Being handled by strangers (way more than cats as dogs are often taken out of their kennels for walks)
- Routine changes (i.e. access to the outdoors for elimination)
- Sleep deprivation
- Excessive noise levels
- Olfactory irritants
- Scary events
- A lack of exercise
- Social stress
- Barrier frustration (being able to see but not interact with other dogs)
- Loneliness (remember they are a social obligate species)
- Conflict (i.e. being afraid of the same person they are dependent on)

The manifestations of stress for the dogs include lethargy and depression, boredom, fear, overstimulation (which can be as detrimental as under-stimulation), and barrier frustration related behaviors such as barking and lunging at human and dog passers-by. Additionally, some dogs develop stereotypic behaviors. Stereotypic behaviors are repetitive patterned behaviors that appear to serve no function. They often develop in situations

known to be aversive and stressful. There is a genetic component to the development and display of stereotypic behaviors so not all dogs will display these troubling behaviors. The stereotypic behaviors we often see in shelters include pacing, spinning, circling, jumping, cage biting, and self-licking. The important thing to remember about stereotypic behaviors is that once they begin to be displayed no amount of stress reduction or enrichment will usually stop them, so it is critical to provide stress reduction and enrichment daily before they develop.

Stress Reduction for Shelter Dogs

Stress reduction procedures should start the very first minute the dogs arrive at the shelter. The first thing to consider is providing the dogs with a comfortable environment. Giving them soft bedding (rugs or blankets) or a raised Kuranda® bed from the first day is important. While many shelters provide these comforts to their adoption floor dogs, many neglect to provide comfort to the dogs in the holding area where they spend their first few days.

Consider housing the scared dogs in a quiet section of your shelter. If you do not have one, consider creating one. It's very difficult for a scared dog to acclimate when they are surrounded by boisterous noisy dogs on either side of them. Providing a crate (with door off)

in the kennel for scared dogs can give them a place to hide and feel more secure.

One of the biggest stressors for shelter dogs is the noise levels. The sound in the kennel when dogs are barking can reach a decibel level that is a welfare concern. Reducing the noise through sound baffling panels that absorb the noise is important. Visual barriers on cages of individual barking dogs or the whole kennel at walking time can also help to reduce the barking. The *click-for-quiet* program is a wonderful strategy to reduce the barking. It is a simple program that involves staff and volunteers rewarding the dog (with a marker signal followed by a treat) when the dog doesn't bark when the cage front is approached. When every staff member and volunteer working the dog area does one round of *click-for-quiet* each day, the barking can be significantly reduced.

Playing calming music or books on tape can also reduce stress for the shelter dogs.

Getting the dogs out of the kennel to spend time outside or in a *real-life room* is very beneficial to help them de-stress from the kennel environment.

Social interaction with humans can go a long way to reducing stress. Not only a daily walk or two but sitting quietly with the dog can

reduce their stress. Gentle petting or massage can further reduce overall stress levels.

All animals feel better when they know what to expect so making the daily occurrences predictable can reduce stress. Scheduling feeding, walking, social interactions, and enrichment at roughly the same time each day can reduce stress.

Aerobic exercise can also counteract the adverse effects of stress. Taking the dog for a brisk walk or run, or playing fetch in a play yard, can provide much needed aerobic exercise.

Lastly, two products that can help reduce stress in the shelter dogs are the Adaptil® calming pheromone collar and the Thundershirt®. The best way to use the Thundershirt® is to put it on the dog for 20-30 minutes each day. If it is left on for longer periods of time, the dog's nervous system will simply habituate to the pressure and it will no longer be an effective stress reducer.

Stress reduction is important. In fact, it is the most important part of a behavior-wellness program in your shelter.

**STRESS REDUCTION
FOR SHELTER DOGS**

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

ENRICHMENT FOR SHELTER CATS & DOGS

Enrichment involves providing an interesting, challenging, stimulating environment that encourages the animals to think, learn, engage, and be well both mentally and physically.

Enrichment is important in the shelter because the animals are living in a stressful environment, are mentally and physically under-stimulated, and are confined to a small area where they have little to no control.

As stated in the Association of Shelter Veterinarians Shelter Guidelines – “enrichment is given the same significance as other components of animal care, such as nutrition and veterinary care, and is never considered optional.”

The four categories of enrichment are described below:

ENVIRONMENTAL ENRICHMENT

Environmental Enrichment involves modifying the environment so that it is more comfortable, provides more space, provides more choices, and is more stimulating. Some examples of environmental enrichment include:

1. Comfortable bedding in the cage or kennel.
2. Hiding and perching options for the caged cats.

3. More usable space and more choices. This is particularly important in cat colony rooms where you will want to utilize the vertical space by hanging shelves on the walls and ways to traverse the entire area.
4. Real-life rooms for the animals (cat and dog rooms should be separate) to spend time decompressing from the shelter environment.

SENSORY ENRICHMENT

Sensory Enrichment involves stimulating all the animal’s senses with your enrichment strategies (sight, sound, smell, and taste). Some examples of sensory enrichment include:

Auditory Stimulation

1. Playing music, talk radio, or books on tape.
2. Sound machines that plays different sounds (heartbeat, ocean waves, babbling brooks, rainforest sounds, etc.).
3. Hanging wind chimes.
4. Birdsong CDs for the cats. (Bird songs are a biologically significant sound to cats which means they are hardwired to be interested in these sounds regardless of prior exposure.)

Olfactory Stimulation

1. Pinch of a dry spice (cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger) or drop of liquid food extract (vanilla, almond, banana, etc.) rubbed onto a cloth, stuffed animal, or piece of cardboard that is hung from the cage front.
2. Liquid food extract used in cooking (i.e. vanilla, almond, banana etc.) mixed with water and spritzed into the air in a spray bottle.
3. Things from outside (sticks, grass, mud, pinecones, leaves, etc.) put into a plastic container with tiny holes so the animals can sniff the interesting items from nature.
4. Doggie scent yard created on the property where logs, large rocks, leaves, etc. are placed for the dogs to sniff.
5. Treats hidden around a room (for cats and dogs) or scattered in the dog play yard (for only one dog at a time) for them to find.
6. Catnip and/or silver vine for the cats.
7. *Nosework* sessions for the dogs whereby they learn to search for hidden treats.

Visual Stimulation

1. Mobiles for the animals to watch when they move.
2. Bird feeders outside the windows where cats can see them.
3. Playing *cat TV* programs on TVs in the cat rooms.
4. Aquarium (real or fake) in the cat rooms.
5. Blowing bubbles or running a bubble machine for a few minutes.
6. Perpetual motion toys outside the cages (leave going for only a few minutes).
7. Using fishing pole type toys in front of the line of cat cages.

Tactile Stimulation

Many animals respond positively to tactile stimulation from humans (petting and brushing). Make sure to identify the type of touch the animal likes and which body parts to avoid (like a cat's belly).

Taste Stimulation

Provide novel food treats regularly to stimulate the animal's taste buds.

SOCIAL ENRICHMENT

Social Enrichment involves providing opportunities for social contact with humans and conspecifics (if appropriate).

Conspecific Interaction

[ANIMALS OF THEIR OWN SPECIES]

1. Co-housing dogs (if appropriate and safe).
2. Group walks with two to three dogs.
3. Dog play groups (for appropriate dogs).
4. Cat social housing rooms (for appropriate cats).

Human Interaction

1. Sitting quietly with the animal.
2. Petting the animal.
3. Playing with the animal.

BEHAVIORAL ENRICHMENT

Behavioral Enrichment involves giving the animals opportunities to perform species-typical behaviors and giving them opportunities to think and learn.

Opportunities to Perform Species-Typical Behavior

Cats

1. Scratching boards in the cages and scratching posts in the playrooms, cat real-life rooms, and colony rooms.
2. Cat drinking fountains in the colony rooms.
3. Cat grass.
4. Rubbing objects for cats (brushes hung on cage front).

Dogs

1. Safe chew items.
2. Digging pit.

Physical Stimulation [EXERCISE AND PLAY]

Cats

1. Allowing caged cats to go into a visitation room, an office, or a cat real-life room to run, jump, stretch, and play.
2. Cat wheel in colony room and encouraging them to use it.

Dogs

1. Running/jogging with a human.
2. Playing fetch.
3. Playing tug (with rules).
4. Agility course.

Mental Stimulation

1. Food acquisition challenges – Kongs, feeder balls, puzzle feeders.
 - While you can purchase commercial feeder balls and puzzle feeders, you can also make them out of recyclable items such as plastic containers, boxes, egg cartons, laundry jugs, milk jugs, paper bags, etc.
 - PVC piping sanitizable material that you can make pipe feeders out of for dogs and cats.
 - Freeze the animal's meals or treats in water.

A white board hanging in each area (cat and dog) that schedules out a week's-worth of enrichment can be very helpful for staff and volunteers. This helps to keep variety in your enrichment program and can help ensure that each animal gets some form of enrichment each day.

Having a list of all the enrichment strategies that are currently being used (and adding to it when new ideas are successful) hanging where everyone can see it can also be helpful for staff and volunteers to refer to when trying to decide on an enrichment to provide to the animals.

ENRICHMENT PROTOCOL FOR CATS

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

ENRICHMENT PROTOCOL FOR DOGS

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

SHELTER DOG NOSEWORK PROGRAM

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

TRAINING CATS & DOGS IN THE SHELTER

Training the shelter cats and dogs is very beneficial as it provides mental and physical stimulation, facilitates positive associations with humans, and can build confidence in shy or fearful animals. The other important consequence of behavioral training is giving the animals a sense of control, the thing they lack the most when in captivity, as they learn that their behavior can produce reinforcement.

Before we can train the cats and dogs in the shelter, we have to understand how they learn. The two basic forms of learning for dogs and cats are classical conditioning and operant conditioning. Classical conditioning, also called Pavlovian conditioning after the scientist that discovered it, is all about making associations. If you remember Pavlov's study, he repeatedly rang the tone and gave the dogs food and eventually the dog's started to salivate when they heard the tone even with no food in the vicinity. The dogs had made an association that the tone predicts food. Dogs and cats learn through Pavlovian conditioning all of the time. When a dog sees his leash, he knows he is going for a walk. When a cat hears the cat food can opening, she knows she's getting fed. Classical (Pavlovian) conditioning is a very common and powerful form of learning.

Operant conditioning refers to learning from the consequence of behavior. If what follows

a behavior is reinforcing to the animal, then the animal will most likely display the behavior again. If there is no reinforcement following the behavior, then it probably won't be displayed again. Animals simply have no reason to expend energy on behavior that doesn't result in reinforcement of some kind. This means that if you see an animal displaying a behavior repeatedly, they are receiving reinforcement following the behavior.

Training involves manipulating the consequences of behavior. If we hope to increase the frequency of a particular behavior, we reinforce it. If we hope to reduce the frequency of a particular behavior, we punish it. Listed below are the four consequences of behavior and what they mean.

- Something good happens (positive reinforcement) – meaning that the trainer adds something the animal likes (food treat, attention, play, etc.) as a consequence for a desired behavior. Example: dog sits – trainer gives him/her a treat.
- Something bad happens (positive punishment) – meaning that the trainer adds something the animal doesn't like (verbal correction, collar correction, physically hitting or kicking the dog, etc.) as a consequence of an undesirable behavior. Example: dog

pulls on the leash – trainer gives a harsh leash correction.

- Something bad goes away (negative reinforcement) – meaning that the trainer takes away something the animal doesn't like (stops yelling, jerking, choking, hitting, etc.) as a consequence of a desired behavior. Example: dog stops pulling and walks nicely – trainer stops the leash correction.
- Something good goes away (negative punishment) – meaning that the trainer takes away something that the animal likes (attention, play, treats) as a consequence of an undesirable behavior. Example: dog jumps up on trainer – trainer turns and walks away from dog thus removing the attention.

While all four consequences work to change behavior, the use of positive reinforcement (adding something good for desired behavior) and negative punishment (taking away something good for undesirable behavior) are the two training consequences that take the animal's emotional response into consideration. Using positive punishment

(adding something bad for undesirable behavior) can cause pain, fear and intimidation and can create a negative association with the trainer and the training process.

There are three techniques we can employ to train an animal to perform a specific behavior – luring, shaping, and capturing. Luring involves using a prompt (usually a food treat) to get the animal into a desired position. For example, if you want to teach an animal to turn in a circle, you simply use a food treat as a lure that the animal will follow in a circle around his/her body and then reward the action with the treat. Shaping involves rewarding successive approximations of the behavior until you get the final desired response. To shape an animal to turn in a circle you would reward any slight movement to the right and then you would require farther and farther movements to the right each trial until you have shaped him/her to turn all the way around in a circle. Capturing is the most effective way to train a behavior because you are simply rewarding a behavior that the animal has consciously decided to perform. If an animal should happen to turn in a circle, you would simply reward that captured behavior.

MARKER-BASED TRAINING

[CLICKER TRAINING]

Marker-based training involves using a signal to indicate the exact behavior that has earned the reinforcement. This training methodology is the most effective way to train animals to perform behavior because it involves precise communication to the animal. Research on animal learning has found that if you do not reward the behavior while it is happening or within a half second, the animal will not associate the reward with the behavior. Clicker training is a marker-based training method that is very effective to use with the shelter cats and dogs.

Clicker training is a science-based methodology that involves both classical conditioning and operant conditioning. The first step is to pair the sound of the clicker with the delivery of a reward (classical conditioning). Once the animal learns that the sound of the clicker predicts the reward, the click sound is used to *mark* the exact behavior to be reinforced, thus the clicker becomes a *conditioned reinforcer*. Once you have associated the clicker with a reward, a reward must always follow the click so as not to lose the association. Essentially, the clicker marks the behavior that earns the reward and tells the animal that the reward is on its way.

Whether you are using luring, shaping, or capturing, a marker signal enhances the learning for the animal because it pinpoints the exact behavior being reinforced. The marker signal does not have to be a clicker; any sound will work (tongue click, finger snap, or a word like *yes* or *click*), but the sound produced by a clicker is a clear unambiguous signal and is therefore a useful tool.

THE CUE

The *cue* is the prompt that triggers an action. To add a verbal or physical cue to a behavior, simply pair the cue with the action. If you wanted to add the cue of “spin” to the action of turning in a circle, you would simply say the word “spin” as the animal performs the action until he/she learns the association. Once the association is made, the cue can be used to elicit the behavior.

In the shelter environment, we also want to teach the animals *environmental cues*. An environmental cue is something that happens in the environment that triggers a specific behavior. An example of an environmental cue would be a person approaching the cage. If we teach the animals that they get reinforced if they move to the front of the cage when humans approach, we have taught them a cue that requires nothing

from the person doing the approaching. This concept is very valuable in our work with shelter animals.

PROTOCOL FOR TRAINING CATS IN THE SHELTER

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

PROTOCOL FOR TRAINING DOGS IN THE SHELTER

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

WHERE TO START

Starting our training where the animals spend most of their time, inside their cage or kennel run, makes the most sense. A great behavior to start with is *target training*.

Target training is a very valuable training technique used frequently in zoos and aquariums to encourage animals to move from one place to another or to position their bodies in certain ways for examination. Targeting is also used as a form of luring to train animals to perform other behaviors.

Target training involves simply teaching a shelter cat or dog that touching his/her nose to a target item will earn reinforcement. Because most cats and dogs will investigate an item presented to them by smelling it, nose targeting is an easy behavior to capture. The procedure involves presenting the target item to the animal and using your

marker signal to let him/her know that he/she earned a reward for touching the target with his/her nose. You are essentially using the target item as the lure to encourage the behavior and then capturing and rewarding the nose-touching response.

In-Cage Target Training

The target item can be the palm of your hand at the cage front for dogs or the tip of your finger for cats, but any item presented to the animal can work as a target. A telescoping target stick can be useful when working with animals that are too shy or frightened to get close to the trainer. The benefit of using your hand or finger as the target is that it's attached to your body, so you always know where it is. The extra bonus of hand/finger targeting is that it teaches the animals that a hand/finger at the cage front predicts good things, making the animals more likely to approach a potential adopter who reaches towards them. Of course, washing between animals will prevent the spread of disease.

In-cage target training provides mental and social stimulation, is easy to do with all of the animals, forms a positive association with people at the cage front, and teaches the animals a more positive way to interact with people who approach the cage.

TARGET TRAINING CATS AT THE CAGE FRONT

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

TARGET TRAINING DOGS AT THE CAGE FRONT

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

TRAINING CATS TO INCREASE ADOPTABILITY

Because we know that potential adopters are looking for a connection with a cat, the first behavior to teach that may increase their adoptability is for the cat to approach the cage front when someone approaches their cage. This is a simple behavior to train using luring, shaping, or capturing. Capturing simply involves clicking and rewarding any spontaneous movement to the front of the cage when you approach. Luring involves placing a food treat near the front of the cage and clicking the cat for coming forward for the treat. Shaping involves tossing a treat near the cat and clicking any forward movement to the treat, then tossing another a little closer to the front while clicking any forward movement to the treat, and finally placing the treat just inside the cage door and clicking the cat for coming all the way to the front.

Another great thing to teach the cats to increase their adoptability is to perform a

trick. You can train a shelter cat to sit, *sit like a bunny*, high five, roll over, or turn in a circle. Just use a food lure or a target stick to encourage the cat to move into the position you want and click and treat the movement. Since most people do not know that cats can be trained, a cat who can perform a trick will be highly appealing to adopters.

TRAINING CATS TO INCREASE ADOPTABILITY

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

TRAINING DOGS TO INCREASE ADOPTABILITY

The four main skills that help increase adoptions for dogs are being quiet when someone approaches the cage (not barking), sitting at the cage front when someone approaches, not jumping up on people during visits, and not pulling on the leash during walks. These are the four behaviors that you should begin training.

No Barking at Approaching People

The *click-for-quiet* program involves rewarding the dogs for not barking when someone approaches the kennel. It is a very simple exercise that anyone can do with any dog. It involves approaching the kennel and if the dog is quiet – mark the quiet with the clicker and give the reward. If the dog barks upon

your approach, simply walk away. If you take away the possible reinforcement (attention and food) as a consequence of the barking (negative punishment), the dog will soon learn that barking is not working and will hopefully try another behavior the next time. When the dogs learn that not barking is what earns the reward, they will start to exhibit that behavior every time.

When the *click-for-quiet* program is done consistently by every staff member and volunteer that enters the kennel area, the dogs will be much quieter when people are in there.

CLICK-FOR-QUIET BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION PROTOCOL

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

Sit at the Cage Front When Someone Approaches

After you have successfully taught a dog that being quiet when someone approaches their kennel earns a reward, you can add a little delay before you click to see if the dog offers a sit (do not ask for a sit – we want the person approaching the kennel to be the environmental cue for quiet and sit). Because sit is a default behavior for many dogs, when you approach the kennel and the dog doesn't hear the click right away for being quiet, many will offer a sit to see if that

works to earn the reward. When the dog sits that is when you click and then deliver the treat. The dog is now trained to sit quietly at the cage front when someone approaches.

No Jumping on People

The first step to training a shelter dog not to jump up is by insisting on *four on the floor to open the door*. Approach the kennel, click and reward quiet, and then reach for the kennel door latch. If the dog jumps up, let go of the latch and wait. When the dog gets off the door and keeps four feet on the floor reach for the latch again. Repeat this step until you can reach for the kennel door latch without the dog jumping up. Then start to open the door. If the dog jumps up, close the door and wait. When the dog gets off the door and keeps four feet on the floor, start to open the door again. Repeat this step until you can open the door and leash the dog without him/her jumping up.

Next, we need to teach the dog that jumping on people chases them away. You can start by tethering the dog using the leash and then approaching. If the dog jumps up on you, turn and walk outside of his/her tethered range. Repeat this until the dog keeps four on the floor as you approach (or sits which is even better) – click and reward the behavior. You can also work in pairs with

one person holding the end of the leash and the other person approaches the dog. If the dog jumps on the approaching person, the person turns and walks away. When the dog keeps four feet on the floor or sits when the person approaches, the dog receives the click and treat.

JUMPING BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION PROTOCOL

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

No Pulling on the Leash

Many shelter dogs pull on their leash because they are so excited to be getting out of their kennel and because they typically do not get enough exercise during their shelter stay. Pulling on the leash can deter potential adopters, especially for large strong dogs. Teaching the dogs to walk nicely on the leash can go a long way to getting them adopted.

For mild pullers, you can simply stop all forward movement when there is tension in the leash and only continue walking when the leash is slack. For moderate to severe pullers, a tool can aid in this process. The front clasp harnesses can help because when the leash is coming out from the chest of the dog, when he/she pulls and you stop,

the tension in the leash will guide their body to the side and they are more likely to slacken the leash – at which point you start to walk again.

Clicking and rewarding loose-leash walking can add another incentive to walking without pulling.

PULLING BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION PROTOCOL

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

Additional Training

Once the four behaviors discussed above are trained, additional behaviors can be worked on if there is time. Teaching the dogs basic commands like *sit*, *down*, *stay*, and *come* can certainly help the dog be more adoptable. But as I stated earlier in the cat section, teaching the dog to perform a cute trick like shake, wave, roll over, or spin can go a long way to impressing a potential adopter. Tricks can be easy to teach with a food lure and the marker signal of the clicker.

TRAINING DOGS TO INCREASE ADOPTABILITY

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION FOR SHELTER DOGS

The shelter environment is very hard on the animals as discussed in Chapter 3. Being confined to a cage where they have no control can lead the animals to experience the negative emotions of fear, frustration, and anger. These negative emotions can alter behavior. It is the emotionally driven behaviors that we try to modify in the shelter.

Behavior modification involves changing an animal's undesirable behavior to a more desirable behavior. However, because the problematic behaviors we see in the shelter animals stem from the negative emotions of fear, frustration, and anger, we need to modify the emotion to change the behavior.

The first technique that is used to modify behavior is called *habituation*. Habituation means that the animal simply gets used to the stimulus. There are two forms of habituation – flooding and systematic desensitization. Flooding involves exposing the animal to the scary stimulus at full strength for as long as it takes to stop the animal from reacting negatively to it. Flooding is not considered humane treatment for animals, especially when the emotion of fear is involved. Therefore, we do not use flooding as a technique to modify the behavior of shelter animals.

The other form of habituation is systematic desensitization which involves exposing the animal to the triggering stimulus, at first at low strength, and then gradually increasing the stimulus strength over time so that the animal can learn to accept it without feeling a negative emotion (fear, frustration, anger). This is the more humane habituation method used to modify behavior and is what we use in the shelter.

Counterconditioning involves changing the animal's emotional response to the triggering stimulus from negative to positive. This is accomplished by pairing the triggering stimulus with something the animal finds reinforcing such as food or play. Classical counterconditioning involves delivering the reinforcement every time the animal sees the triggering stimulus regardless of the animal's displayed behavior. Operant counterconditioning involves delivering the reinforcement every time the animal sees the triggering stimulus only if the animal is not displaying the negative behavior we are trying to modify.

To modify behavior, it is best to combine systematic desensitization and classical and/or operant counterconditioning to help animals overcome their negative emotional and behavioral reactions to stimuli.

Modifying behavior in the shelter can be difficult because the shelter environment is not terribly conducive to effective behavior modification for many reasons, as listed below:

- 1. Lack of time** – modifying behavior effectively takes time.
- 2. Lack of consistency** – to effectively modify behavior, there must be consistency with the program.
- 3. Inability to manage the environment** – to modify behavior, you must prevent the animal from triggering to the emotions and behaviors we are trying to modify.
- 4. Inhibited learning** – chronic stress inhibits learning so the animals will not be as receptive to learning a new way to feel and behave in a place where they are under constant stress.
- 5. Lack of generalization** – learned behavior doesn't generalize well. If an animal learns something in one situation or environment, it does not mean that the learning will be reflected in every situation or environment.
- 6. Stimulus generalization** – negative associations generalize very easily so the animal is likely to feel the same negative emotion towards anything that looks like the stimulus that initially triggered the

fear. For example, if one man with a hat on beats the dog, the dog can generalize that negative experience to all men with hats on. This process is essential for survival.

Due to the fact that it is difficult to modify behavior in the shelter environment there are certain severe behavioral conditions that the average shelter should not attempt to modify. These include dogs who have been severely traumatized by abuse, severely unsocialized dogs (which include feral dogs and adult dogs from puppy mill or hoarding cases), and dogs who exhibit a dangerous level of aggressive behavior. The amount of behavior modification these dogs need far exceed the ability of the average shelter's knowledge and resources, and these dogs will only suffer more if kept in the shelter environment long term. Seeking transfer to an organization that can do extensive behavior modification may be an option for some of these dogs (with the exception of dangerous dogs).

Despite all of the reasons stated above why behavior modification in the shelter is difficult, there are behaviors that the average shelters should try to modify. These include fear of the shelter environment, in-cage reactivity stemming from barrier frustration, on-leash reactivity, jumpy/mouthy behavior, and leash grabbing.

FEARFUL DOGS

There are a lot of contributing factors to the fear that we see in many shelter dogs. These include the genetic makeup of the dog, lack of socialization, bad past experiences, and of course, the scary shelter environment itself. We will never know how much the first three factors are contributing to a dog's fear, and these are things that we cannot change for that dog, but we can help them overcome their fear of the shelter environment if this is the main cause of an individual's fear.

For many fearful shelter dogs, getting them out of the shelter environment as soon as possible is the most humane thing to do. Placing the dog into a foster home or making efforts to get the dog sent to a reputable foster-based rescue or adoptive home quickly are the best possible strategies. But while the dog is residing in the shelter other strategies can be employed to help reduce the fear. If possible, having the dog live in an office rather than the kennels can be very helpful. If not, moving the scared dogs to a quieter area of the shelter is important. Every shelter should have a quiet area for their scared dogs. This can be a section of kennels at the end of a room or a whole separate room. Providing the dog with a crate in the kennel to hide in (door off) or covering the dog's kennel front with a visual barrier can also be very helpful.

Calm, non-threatening social interaction with people can help the scared dogs feel better in this scary environment. At least two staff members or volunteers should be assigned to work with each scared dog. Sitting quietly at their cage front in a non-threatening way (side-ways body posture and no eye contact) is where to start this work. Tossing treats while sitting with the dog can help to form a positive association even if the dog doesn't eat the treats during the visit. Keep the visits short, five minutes at a time, but repeat them several times a day. If the kennel is large enough to be safe, the next step once the dog has shown improvement towards those people would be to sit quietly inside the kennel with non-threatening body language tossing treats to the dog. Eventually getting the dog to take the treats from the person's hand is ideal.

Once the dog is comfortable with the people doing the in-cage behavior modification, they can take the dog out of the kennel to a quiet space to spend time. Offering special treats in a non-threatening way will help to continue forming the positive association. In addition to using special food treats, play can reduce a dog's negative emotions and continue the bond building with the humans. When dogs are playing, they are usually in a more positive state of mind. Play can alter feelings of fear and anxiety. Another strategy

is to utilize another dog (if the dog is not afraid of other dogs) to model social behavior towards humans for the scared dog.

Once the scared dog trusts a few people, those people can start to use systematic desensitization and counterconditioning to help the dog feel more positive about other people. To start this process, the scared dog should be kept a good distance from the stranger and offered special treats when he/she is brave enough to look at the person. The hope is that soon the dog will feel happy when other people are in sight because they predict special treats. Throughout the behavior modification sessions, the dog can be moved closer and closer to the strangers while receiving their special treats. Eventually the strangers themselves can toss the special treats to the dog.

In addition to the above strategies, I have developed a behavior modification program to help the fearful dogs cope with living in the kennel in such a scary place. This program also uses systematic desensitization and classical counterconditioning. The program involves hanging a specific-colored card (I use blue) on the front of the kennel to indicate to everyone walking by that a scared dog resides in that kennel. Furthermore, the cards will be numbered one to three to

indicate to everyone the step of the program on which you are working. A number one on the card indicates that everyone passing the kennel should toss a treat into the kennel without stopping. This step should be done for at least a day or two and everyone passing the kennel should participate. After that, a card with the number two will be hung on the front of the kennel which indicates that everyone passing by should stop at the kennel front, with sideways body language and no eye contact or talking, and toss the treats inside. This step should be done for a day or two. After that, a card with the number three will be hung on the front of the kennel which indicates that everyone passing by should stop and speak to the dog in a calm friendly voice while tossing the treats inside. This program will teach the dogs that people passing the kennel predict good things but because it is done in a slow systematic way, it should increase the likelihood of success.

FEARFUL DOG BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION PROTOCOL

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

FEARFUL DOG IN THE CAGE BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION PROTOCOL

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

Fear of Handling

Some dogs who come into your shelter will exhibit a fear of certain kinds of handling. They may show this fear because of a lack of socialization to handling, they have had bad experiences with being handled, or they are simply afraid in the shelter and, therefore, more cautious of handling from strangers. If you suspect that the dog is painful or has a medical issue leading to the handling discomfort and fear, the veterinarian should be notified.

Systematic desensitization and counter-conditioning are also used to help dogs overcome their fear of handling. For example, if the dog is uncomfortable having his/her ears touched you would start by touching another area of the body while delivering a special treat. Then you slowly work your way up to the dog's ears – touching that sensitive body part while delivering the treats. Once the dog knows that an ear touch predicts special treats he/she will be more comfortable with this handling. After one person accomplishes this goal, others should participate in the behavior modification so that the new learned emotional response to ear touching will generalize to other people.

HANDLING SENSITIVITIES BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION PROTOCOL

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

Fear of the Leash

Some dogs who come into your shelter will be afraid of being leashed. This fear can stem from being head-shy or simply that the action is scary from a stranger in the scary shelter environment. Some dogs, once leashed, will fall to the ground and not walk. This behavior usually stems from the fact that the dog has never been walked on a leash.

Systematic desensitization and counterconditioning are used to acclimate a dog to the leash itself and the act of being leashed. We start by pairing the sight of the leash with special treats. Put the leash on the floor and surround it with the treats. As the dog eats the treats, he/she sees the leash is harmless. Next you would hold the leash in your hand, show it to the dog, and give the special treat. This will teach the dog that the sight of the leash in your hand predicts the special treats. Next you will hold the opening of the slip lead in one hand and offer the special treat in the other positioned in such a way that the dog must put his/her nose through the loop to get the treat. You would continue this process until the dog is comfortable putting his/her whole head into the opening of the slip lead to get to the special treats. Now you have a dog that is comfortable with you putting on the slip lead.

Dogs who have never walked on a leash usually either drop to the ground as soon as they feel any pressure from the leash, or they have a complete panic attack and start to flail around. For these dogs, having a regular leash attached to a body harness instead of using a slip lead that goes around their neck can be helpful. You would use systematic desensitization and counterconditioning to first acclimate the dog to wearing a harness similar to the way I described above to acclimate the dog to having the leash put on. Once the dog can wear the body harness you start by delivering the treats to the dog while attaching the leash to the harness. When the dog is comfortable with that action, the next step is to let the dog drag the leash around a room or a fenced outdoor area while you toss treats for the dog to find. When this is going well, you can start to pick up the end of the leash and toss treats for the dog to find, trying at first to keep the tension out of the leash but eventually tossing the treats farther away so the dog has to move to the treat and tightens up the slack on the leash. Continue this process until the dog feels comfortable moving around the space to get treats even when there is some tension on the leash. Another strategy to use when first teaching the dog to walk on the leash is to fill a ball launcher with a food paste (peanut butter, spray cheese, liverwurst, etc.) and hold it out in front of the dog while he/she walks, allowing him/her to take a lick every few feet.

DESENSITIZING A DOG TO A LEASH BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION PROTOCOL

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

BARRIER FRUSTRATION RELATED REACTIVITY

Barrier frustration is very common in shelter dogs. This is because they are social animals who are compelled to greet others and when they are physically prevented from doing something that they are highly motivated to do, they become frustrated. Frustrated dogs often start to become reactive, barking and lunging at passing dogs and/or people. This behavior is not healthy for the dogs or pleasant for the passersby and could inhibit adoption.

The first thing to consider for barrier reactive dogs is kennel placement. These dogs should be housed in the least arousing kennel where not as many people and dogs pass by. Additionally, preventing visual access to passersby using some form of visual barrier can be extremely helpful when active behavior modification is not taking place.

To modify barrier reactivity, we start by using classical counterconditioning. This is the easiest form of counterconditioning and allows everyone to participate regardless of any behavior training. The behavior modification program that I have developed for

barrier reactivity is called the *food-chucking program*.

The food-chucking program involves hanging colored cards on the cage front to inform all staff and volunteers that a cage reactive dog resides in the kennel. An orange card hanging on the cage front indicates a dog-reactive dog resides inside and everyone who walks by the cage with another dog should chuck food treats inside as they pass by. A yellow card hanging on the cage front indicates a human-reactive dog and everyone who walks by the cage should chuck food treats inside as they pass by. If the dog is both human- and dog-reactive, both cards will be hanging on the cage front and everyone passing the cage, with or without a dog, should chuck the food treats in as they pass. This program conditions the dogs to learn that passing dogs and people predict a rain of treats into the cage. This process helps to change a negative emotion (frustration) into a positive one (happiness). This is the easiest program that we can do in the shelter to

reduce barrier frustration related reactivity. As long as every staff member and volunteer entering the kennel area follows the protocol, the behavior of the reactive dogs will improve.

CAGE REACTIVITY BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION FOOD CHUCKING PROTOCOL

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

If you have the time to do more intensive behavior modification for the cage reactive dogs, operant counterconditioning can be employed in addition to the classical conditioning (food chucking). This process involves using a clicker to mark any calm behavior at the cage front when people or dogs walk by before delivering the food treat. As explained above, operant counterconditioning requires the dog to exhibit an alternative behavior (sitting or standing quietly) to the one we are trying to modify (reactivity) in order to receive the reinforcement.

ON-LEASH REACTIVITY TO OTHER DOGS

Many shelter dogs react negatively to the sight of other dogs when they are on leash. This behavior usually stems from fear of other dogs (self-protective behavior), dislike of other dogs, or simply frustration from the restraint of the leash preventing a normal greeting. While the behavior modification process I describe below can help reduce on-leash reactivity, it will not necessarily modify a dog's offensive or defensive aggressive behavior towards other dogs when not on leash.

First Step - The Management Tool

The management tool that I recommend to help modify on-leash reactivity is a head halter (I prefer the gentle leader). Before using a head halter however, you must first desensitize the dog to wear it because the feel of the nose loop is often unpleasant to the dog. To accomplish this, we use systematic desensitization and counterconditioning to acclimate the dog to the head halter. For most dogs, a few short sessions each day for several days will accomplish this goal.

DESENSITIZING A DOG TO WEAR A HEAD HALTER BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION PROTOCOL

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

Once the dog is acclimated to wearing the head halter, the tool can be used to gently and humanely control the reactive dog's body by turning the head away from the other dog. Additionally, the gentle leader can be used to control the dog's mouth if he/she is triggered to aggressive barking, air snapping, or biting. To accomplish this, simply pull up on the leash to tighten the two loops of the head halter and hold the gentle pressure until the dog calms down. Once the dog stops the reactivity, release the tension and commence with the counterconditioning exercise. The reason why this step is so important is because reactivity is self-reinforcing, meaning that the dog gets his/her own internal and external reinforcement from behaving this way. And remember, reinforced behaviors do not go away, and they get stronger every time they are exhibited. If we hope to modify this behavior, we must be able to limit the reinforcement that the dog receives from behaving this way and stopping the reactivity at its onset can help us do that.

The behavior modification for on-leash reactivity involves operant counterconditioning. Start a fair distance from the other dog and whenever the reactive dog looks at the other dog without exhibiting the reactivity, click (which marks the non-reactive behavior) and deliver the reward. Using

this operant counterconditioning method, the dog will start to learn that non-reactivity is the behavior that is reinforced. Additionally, anytime you are using operant counterconditioning, classical conditioning is also occurring. The dog is also learning that the sight of another dog predicts treats. This process will improve the dog's behavior and emotions at the sight of another dog

If the dog is reactive to people when on the leash, the same protocol described above should be used.

ON-LEASH REACTIVITY TO DOGS BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION PROTOCOL

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

ON-LEASH REACTIVITY TO HUMANS BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION PROTOCOL

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

JUMPY/MOUTHY BEHAVIOR

Many shelter dogs who are frustrated by the confinement of the shelter, are not getting enough aerobic exercise during their stay, and/or have a general lack of impulse control can exhibit jumpy/mouthy behavior during interactions with humans. This behavior is not only unpleasant, but it can also be dangerous if the arousal intensifies during the interaction. It is most certainly a behavior we need to manage and modify when possible.

Before we discuss the management and behavior modification needed to deal with jumpy/mouthy behavior we need to discuss the difference between *mouthy* behavior and *biting*. Mouthy behavior is when the dog uses his/her mouth on humans during play, when excited, or when attention-seeking. Biting, on the other hand, is when a dog uses his/her mouth to control an encounter – either to get what he/she wants or to stop what he/she doesn't want. These two behaviors are often confused in the shelter and any mouth contact that doesn't break the skin is typically called *mouthy* behavior. However, dogs have complete control over the strength of their bite. When a dog bites to control a situation but doesn't apply enough pressure to cause broken skin, this is an *inhibited bite*. Inhibited bites and mouthy behavior are different. Dogs with

the propensity to bite (even if inhibited) when they are dealing with social conflict can be dangerous, especially to children. Careful adoption matching and counseling are necessary for these dogs. Dogs who are simply being *mouthy* need to be taught that although this is acceptable behavior when playing with another dog, it is inappropriate when directed to humans.

The dogs that exhibit jumpy/mouthy behavior require daily physical aerobic exercise (fast walks, runs, fetch game, agility exercise, and play group, if appropriate), mental stimulation with all meals being fed using feeder balls and puzzle feeders, and training.

The training that these dogs require involves a lot of impulse control exercises such as sit-stay, down-stay, wait at the door, leave it (walking away from an object), and ignore it (not going for an object until released to do so). During the training sessions the handler should use a high rate of reinforcement for behaviors that are incompatible with jumpy/mouthy behavior (four on the floor, sit, down, walking nicely on leash, etc.). When the reward is delivered to the dog, it should be given low or tossed on the floor as not to encourage the dog to jump up for the treat.

When taking these dogs out of the kennel it is advisable to give them a toy to grab before

leashing them up so that their mouth is occupied by something other than your body. For dog's who won't take a toy, tossing treats on the floor a little ahead as you walk the dog outside can be helpful to keep the dog's focus down rather than jumping up.

There are several exercises that help modify jumpy/mouthy behavior and they are listed below.

Do Nothing Exercise

The *do nothing* exercise helps to teach the dog to be calm when sitting with a human. This exercise should be done with the dog daily by several different people.

'DO NOTHING' BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION PROTOCOL

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

Tethered Play Sessions

This exercise will teach the dog that jumping up and/or mouthing ends the play and chases the person away. This exercise should be done with the dog daily by several different people.

TETHERED PLAY BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION PROTOCOL

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

Controlled Tug Games

While many people discourage playing tug with shelter dogs, this game can be valuable to teach a dog impulse control and to turn off their arousal if the game is played using specific rules.

CONTROLLED TUG BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION PROTOCOL

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

LEASH GRABBING

Many shelter dogs grab ahold of the leash during walks and tug. Leash grabbing is a self-reinforcing behavior as dogs who like to tug get the pressure feedback they enjoy because you cannot drop the leash for fear of the dog getting loose. This is what makes this behavior so difficult to manage.

Many dogs who grab ahold of the leash and tug during walks are the same dogs that exhibit jumpy/mouthy behavior. The exercises described above should be done with the dogs that exhibit both of these problematic behaviors.

Leash grabbing behavior is mostly managed using the tools and strategies listed below.

Tools That Can Help

1. Chain leash – most dogs don't like to bite onto chain.
2. Choke collar link – open the choke collar flat and clip one end to the dog's collar and the other end to the leash. This essentially puts a short chain link where the dog is most likely to grab.
3. PVC pipe – once the leash is on the dog, slide a four-foot length of PVC pipe over the leash.
4. Leash link product
<https://www.leashlinks.com/>
5. Leash pole product
<https://animal-care.com/product/humaniac-leash-pole/>

Other Strategies to Try

1. Redirect the dog onto a tug toy any time he/she grabs the leash.
2. Walk the dog with two leashes – one connected to a neck collar and another to a body harness and drop the leash that the dog takes hold of. Without the pressure feedback, leash grabbing is not as rewarding for the dog. This

strategy takes a little skill as not to drop both leashes at once risking the dog getting loose.

3. Distraction – add a pasty food (peanut butter, spray cheese, or liverwurst) into the cup of a ball launcher and hold it in front of the dog’s face while you walk the dog to the destination.
4. Head halter – properly fit and desensitize the dog to wear a head halter so that you can use the head halter to control the dog’s mouth.
5. Last resort – desensitize the dog to wear a basket muzzle and have the dog wear the muzzle on walks. This is not a long-term solution but might help the dog learn that doing other things on walks (like sniffing the ground) is just as rewarding as grabbing the leash.

LEASH GRABBING BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION PROTOCOL

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

DESENSITIZING A DOG TO WEAR A BASKET MUZZLE BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION PROTOCOL

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

DESENSITIZING A DOG TO WEAR A HEAD HALTER BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION PROTOCOL

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

RESOURCE GUARDING

Some dogs exhibit resource guarding behavior over their food bowl or things they have taken possession of. The dogs may have a history of resource guarding in a previous home, or they may have exhibited the behavior during their stay at the shelter. This behavioral tendency can be a dangerous if the dog’s response includes biting over a resource. In a home with children, especially children under six years old, even low-level resource guarding can be dangerous. It is the responsibility of the shelter to determine the best home for a dog with this propensity. These dogs may not be appropriate for adoption if they have inflicted an injurious broken skin bite to a human over a resource.

If your shelter’s behavior modification program is robust, you may have time to work with dogs who exhibit resource guarding behavior. If you do work with these dogs, it is important to understand that the program must be conducted consistently and by multiple people, so the learning generalizes. Additionally, you can never assume that the behavior has been *fixed* regardless of how well the dog does with the behavior modification. This is because learned behavior does not generalize well, meaning that a new behavioral response learned in one situation (the shelter) may not transfer to another (like the adoptive home).

Food Bowl Guarding

Dogs that have the propensity to guard their food bowl from humans need to learn that people approaching while he/she is eating predict good things. This process involves systematic desensitization and classical conditioning. The person needs to approach the dog while he/she is eating but stay far enough away that the guarding behavior is not triggered and then toss a high value treat (a chunk of meat is best) into the bowl from that distance and then retreat. Throughout the sessions, the person will approach a tiny bit closer before tossing the meat. Over time the person should be able to walk up to the dog who is eating and drop the treat into the bowl. Tethering the dog for these exercises is important for safety. If at any point in the process the dog triggers to aggressive behavior, the person is going through the process too quickly and needs to back up and progress more slowly.

FOOD BOWL GUARDING BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION PROTOCOL

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

Possession Guarding

Dogs that have the propensity to guard items that they have possession of need to learn to readily give up and move away from the item when asked. These two behaviors are typically labeled *drop it*, which means to drop the item that is in his/her mouth, and *leave it*, which means to move away from the item. To accomplish this goal, the dog needs to learn what the two cues mean.

As discussed in Chapter 6, the first step in training a new behavior is to get the behavior to happen. The second step is to add the cue. To get the dog to drop an item, simply show them a special treat and if they want the treat, they will drop the item out of their mouth. Once the dog has performed the *drop-it* behavior a few times and received reinforcement for doing so, the cue can be added. To do this, the trainer would say “drop it” as the dog drops the item from his/her mouth. After several pairings of the cue and the behavior, the cue should then be able to elicit the behavior. Start this process with items the dog does not guard and slowly work up to more valuable items.

To get the dog to walk away from an item, simply lure him/her away with a special treat. Once the dog has performed the *leave-it* behavior a few times and received reinforcement for doing so, the cue can

be added. To do this, the trainer would say “leave it” as the dog moves away from the item. After several pairings of the cue and the behavior, the cue should then be able to elicit the behavior. Start this process with items the dog does not guard and slowly work up to more valuable items.

POSSESSION GUARDING BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION PROTOCOL

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

The important thing to consider when doing behavior modification for resource guarding is that food bowl guarding is easier to modify than possession guarding because it is a very specific event. Dogs who exhibit possession guarding can show this behavior with anything that they take into possession that they feel is worth guarding. People who adopt a dog with the propensity to guard either their food bowl or their possessions need to be told about the behavioral propensity and be given information to continue working on the behavior modification at home. Additionally, resource guarding dogs, regardless of the level of severity, should not be placed into homes with children under six years of age.

CONCLUSION

If your shelter has the resources to conduct behavior modification, it is critically important to use humane, science-based, positive methods which include systematic desensitization and classical and operant conditioning. It is also important to remember that behavior modification takes time and needs to be done consistently to be effective. Even if your behavior modification program improves the dog’s behavioral responses, never assume that you have *fixed* the behavioral issue. Behavior modification takes a very long time, and it is doubtful that in the few weeks that you work with the dog you will have successfully changed the behavior. You will have only started the process so careful adoptions need to be made and the adopters need to be counseled about the issues and the behavior modification required to continue working with the dog in the home. It is also advisable to follow up on all adoptions of dogs who were on a behavior modification program when adopted.

MATCHMAKING

While it is not necessarily the shelter's place to determine if a particular animal is right for a family, there are some situations for at least dog adoptions when efforts should be made to ensure a safe placement. There are some shelter dogs that would not be appropriate for placement into homes with young children. Dogs with the propensity to guard resources, who have handling sensitivities/intolerances, or who become hyper-aroused during play and cannot settle may be problematic or even dangerous around young children. Therefore, a certain degree of matchmaking is appropriate for families with young children. Likewise, there are some shelter dogs that would not be appropriate for placement into homes with other pets. Dogs with a high prey-drive, the propensity to aggressively guard resources from other animals, or who trigger to aggressive behavior towards cats or other dogs can be problematic or even dangerous to the cats or other dogs in a home. Therefore, a certain degree of matchmaking is appropriate for homes that have other pets.

ADOPTION COUNSELING

Once the adopter has chosen an animal that they feel is appropriate for them to take home, the next step is for shelter staff to provide the adopter with information to

ensure the best possible transition for both the animal and the family.

Behavioral issues are the biggest challenge adopters face with their newly adopted animal. Behavioral concerns can affect the bond that the adopter forms with their new companion and when unresolved, can result in the return or rehoming of the animal. Therefore, providing behavioral information during the adoption counseling session is extremely important. The goal, however, is not to overwhelm the adopter with too much information. Focusing on only a few issues and keeping the discussion short and simple will help the adopter retain the information.

I have identified five important species-specific behavioral points (three if the adopter has no other pets in the home) to discuss with adopters during the adoption counseling session.

For cats, these points include information on:

1. Settle-in time when first home.
2. Litterbox use.
3. Providing appropriate scratching posts.
4. How to properly introduce the cat to the resident cat(s).
5. How to properly introduce the cat to the resident dog(s).

For dogs, these points include information on:

1. Housetraining.
2. Safeguarding against separation anxiety.
3. Importance of physical and mental stimulation and training.
4. How to properly introduce the dog to the resident cat(s).
5. How to properly introduce the dog to the resident dog(s).

The combination of in-person adoption counseling accompanied by written take-home information sheets can improve the learning experience for the adopter. For this reason, verbally communicating these three to five most important behavior topics during the adoption counseling session and then giving the adopter a handout that details the same information should improve retention of the material.

The PDFs linked below can be used as a guide for counselors during the adoption counseling session and can then be handed to the adopter to take home.

BEHAVIORAL ADOPTION COUNSELING FOR CATS

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

BEHAVIORAL ADOPTION COUNSELING FOR DOGS

[CLICK TO ACCESS PDF](#)

In addition to the three to five points discussed above, adoption counselors should discuss everything that is known about this particular cat's or dog's basic personality and known behavioral traits. In order to be able to do this, a complete behavioral history on the animal prior to admission to the shelter should have been obtained as discussed in Chapter 1. Additionally, shelter staff should be documenting the personality traits and behavioral tendencies of the animals during their entire stay. Adoption counselors should review the animal's record prior to the counseling session so that all pertinent information about the animal can be shared with the adopter.

Puppy Adoptions

When a shelter is adopting a puppy to a family, there should be additional counseling about the importance of socialization. The critical period for socialization in dogs is between three and twelve weeks of age. Since most puppies are adopted out at eight weeks of age, the family only has one month to socialize their new puppy before the end of that period (of course they should continue to socialize their puppy for the whole first year). The socialization period is the

time when a young animal's brain is open to learning about what to expect in their life. When puppies are socialized to many things in a positive way during this period, they become more secure and emotionally healthy adults. Below is a list of some of the important things that all puppies need socialization to which should be shared with the adopter.

1. All different kinds of people (men, women, elderly, children, different races, etc.).
2. Other puppies and puppy-friendly adult dogs.
3. Many different experiences .
 - a. Being handled all over
 - b. Having nails clipped
 - c. Being brushed
 - d. Riding in a car
 - e. Visiting other homes
 - f. Walking in the neighborhood
 - g. Being alone
 - h. Going to the veterinarian
 - i. Loud noises
 - j. Walking on different surfaces

Conversing with the Adopter

During the adoption counseling session, staff should strive to communicate with the adopter in a conversational way, rather than simply reading from the documentation on the animal. Additionally, counselors are encouraged to listen to the adopter's questions and try to address them thoroughly. Tone of voice is also important when talking with adopters. Counselors should not *preach* to the adopter as if they know nothing at all about animals. Although many adopters know little about animal behavior, they will not listen to the important information you are trying to share if they think that you are being condescending. As discussed in Chapter 1 on intakes, counselors should be polite, attentive, and non-judgmental during the counseling session.

PROVIDE RESOURCES

Providing adopters with resources such as a list of positive dog trainers in your area is also helpful. There are still trainers that use outdated punishment-based training methods that are not only less effective but can cause extreme emotional anguish to dogs and can even trigger aggressive behavior. Adopters should be encouraged to use positive reinforcement when interacting with and training their dog. Shelters need to learn about the methods used by their local

trainers so that they can refer their adopters to only those that use positive reinforcement methods as it is difficult for the average pet owner to know the difference.

Behavioral information tip sheets on your website that address the common problematic behaviors in cats and dogs is an excellent resource for your adopters as well as the general public seeking such information. During the adoption counseling session adopters should be shown where they can find these tip sheets on your website. Alternatively, shelters can direct adopters to these behavioral sheets on my website at <https://www.kelleybollen.com/for-dogs> and <https://www.kelleybollen.com/for-cats>.

The Maddie's Pet Assistant (MPA) program is an excellent resource for adopters. Adopters who download the MPA app are sent regular check-in surveys throughout the first month post-adoption. If the adopter reports

a concern in a survey, they receive an immediate response on the app and in an email that provides them with helpful tips, advice, and resources created by shelter medicine veterinarians and behaviorists that explain how to understand and resolve the issue they are experiencing with their pet. While more serious problems are flagged in the system to alert the shelter that additional assistance is needed, the fact that the adopter is provided with an immediate response containing helpful suggestions is extraordinary. I encourage shelters to sign up for this helpful program at www.maddiespetassistant.org.

Another service that shelters should direct their dog adopters to is Good Pup. This company provides private one-on-one training session on live video calls with top-rated, expert dog trainers. I encourage shelters to provide their dog adopters with information on this service from www.goodpup.com.

This guide is meant to be a reference for animal shelter staff and volunteers to use in order to provide the best possible behavioral care to the cats and dogs residing in your facility. I sincerely hope that the information provided in this guide will improve your understanding of animal behavior as it relates to the shelter environment.

Should you have any questions regarding anything in this guide, please contact me, Kelley Bollen, at [kelley@kelleybollen.com](mailto:kelly@kelleybollen.com).

Kelley Bollen, MS, CABC

www.kelleybollen.com

www.humanenetwork.org/alive-thriving

facebook.com/aliveandthrivingpets

www.youtube.com/AliveThriving

(listed by order of appearance in the guide)

- Stray Cat Intake Questionnaire**
- Stray Dog Intake Questionnaire**
- Animal Control Field Observation Report**
- Animal Control Dog Bite Report**
- Cat Surrender Intake Questionnaire**
- Dog Surrender Intake Questionnaire**
- Dog Bite History Questionnaire**
- Reading Cat Body Language**
- Reading Dog Body Language**
- Safe Humane Handling of Shelter Cats**
- Safe Humane Handling of Shelter Dogs**
- Stress Reduction for Shelter Cats**
- Stress Reduction for Shelter Dogs**
- Enrichment Protocol for Cats**
- Enrichment Protocol for Dogs**
- Shelter Dog Nosework Program**
- Protocol for Training Cats in the Shelter**
- Protocol for Training Dogs in the Shelter**
- Target Training Cats at the Cage Front**
- Target Training Dogs at the Cage Front**
- Training Cats to Increase Adoptability**
- Click for Quiet Behavior Modification Protocol**
- Jumping Behavior Modification Protocol**
- Pulling Behavior Modification Protocol**
- Training Dogs to Increase Adoptability**
- Fearful Dog Behavior Modification Protocol**
- Fearful Dog in the Cage Behavior Modification Protocol**
- Handling Sensitivities Behavior Modification Protocol**
- Desensitizing a Dog to a Leash Behavior Modification Protocol**
- Cage Reactivity Behavior Modification Food Chucking Protocol**
- Desensitizing a Dog to Wear a Head Halter Behavior Modification Protocol**
- On-leash Reactivity to Dogs Behavior Modification Protocol**
- On-leash Reactivity to Humans Behavior Modification Protocol**
- 'Do Nothing' Behavior Modification Protocol**
- Tethered Play Behavior Modification Protocol**
- Controlled Tug Behavior Modification Protocol**
- Leash Grabbing Behavior Modification Protocol**
- Desensitizing a Dog to Wear a Basket Muzzle Behavior Modification Protocol**
- Food Bowl Guarding Behavior Modification Protocol**
- Possession Guarding Behavior Modification Protocol**
- Behavioral Adoption Counseling for Cats**
- Behavioral Adoption Counseling for Dogs**