

SHY DOG SOCIALIZATION



ACAS Foster Program

Goals of the program



- ❑ Cut down on length of stay in shelter for shy/fearful under-socialized dogs
- ❑ Increase successful adoption placement of an at-risk population of shelter dogs
- ❑ Improve safety by ensuring volunteers and foster parents working with shy dogs are highly skilled at reading body language

Which dogs will we be working with?

- Dogs showing fear and/or avoidant of human contact, but still displaying basic social signals
- Dogs surrendered by an owner that have a successful home history as a companion animal
- We will not be working with dogs displaying forward aggression or dogs that we believe are a high risk for unprovoked aggression



Definitions



- **Behavior Modification:** Changing the dog's emotional response to a stimulus in order to change an undesirable behavior. Creating positive associations to things and situations that previously cause the dog stress and/or anxiety.
- **Counter conditioning:** to change the emotional response an animal has to a specific thing or situation; re-teach and change a previously learned response.

Definitions

- **Under socialized:** The peak socialization period in dogs is 3-12 weeks. Dogs that aren't exposed to a variety of things and situations (people, environments, other animals) during this period are more likely to have fearful responses to these things in the future. The more exposure a puppy has to a variety of new things during this time period, the more likely it is that they will be able to generalize this to all new experiences in the future. Poorly socialized dogs have very poor reactions to many new situations as they get older.



Definitions



- **Distance Increasing Behavior:** behavior displayed by a dog to communicate discomfort and/or fear, attempting to communicate to the perceived threat “please go away”; can be used to diffuse a tense situation or as warning signs. These behaviors indicate that the dog **DOES NOT** want an altercation, but rather wants the perceived threat to just go away.



Note the dog's hunched body, lowered head, flattened ears and tucked tail. The dog leans slightly and looks off to the side.



Here the dog licks her lips nervously.



Now the dog yawns in an exaggerated way to release tension, much as a person would.

- **Protracted Warning Signs:** Nice, communicative behaviors that dogs use to express discomfort

Definitions



- **Bite Threshold:** point beyond which a dog is likely to bite. (Take into account intensity of single trigger as well as presence of multiple triggers)
- **Over-Threshold:** the point beyond which an undesirable behavior occurs. Threshold can be proximity of trigger or many triggers occurring simultaneously. Once a dog is over threshold, it's too late to attempt behavior modification in that situation. It's very important to keep the dog under threshold at all times.



- **Trigger Stacking:** when multiple triggers occur simultaneously. Ex: a dog that is afraid of men, hats, and loud noises encounters a garbage collector wearing a hat
- **Flooding:** exposing an animal or person to the thing that frightens them for a sustained period of time – we *do not use this technique at ACAS!*

Definitions

- Operant conditioning: a type of learning in which behavior is modified by the behavior's consequences, such as reward or punishment



Four Quadrants of Operant Conditioning

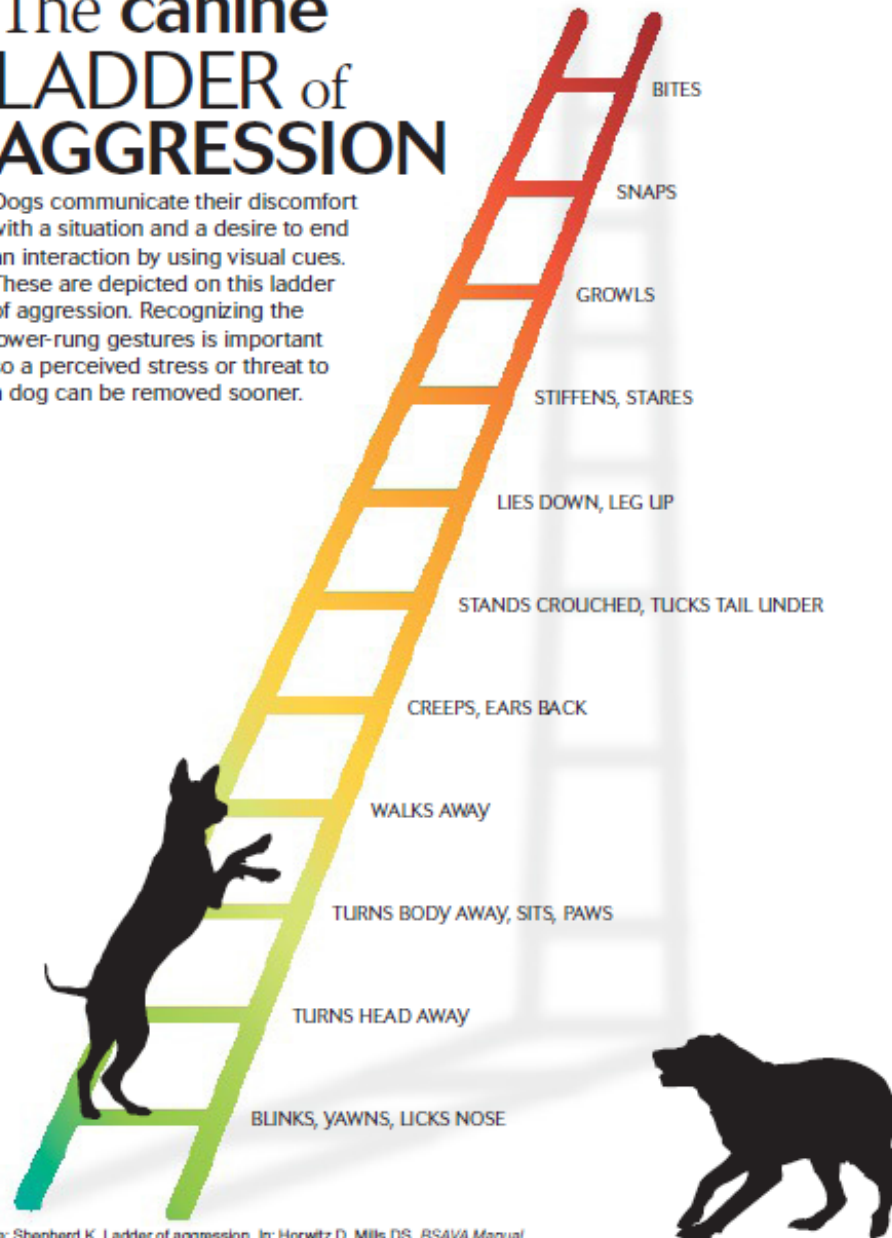
	ADD OR GIVE SOMETHING	SUBTRACT OR TAKE AWAY SOMETHING
THE BEHAVIOR HAPPENS MORE OFTEN	+ R POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT	- R NEGATIVE REINFORCEMENT
THE BEHAVIOR HAPPENS LESS OFTEN	+ P POSITIVE PUNISHMENT	- P NEGATIVE PUNISHMENT

Why aren't we using positive punishment?

- ❑ Positive punishment DOES NOT change the dog's emotional response to the trigger
- ❑ When not extremely accurate on the timing of the punishment, the wrong associations are created in the dog's mind.
- ❑ If protracted warning signs are punished, they will be greatly reduced in frequency, making the dog far less likely to give warning signs before going straight to bite, thus creating a very dangerous dog.

The canine LADDER of AGGRESSION

Dogs communicate their discomfort with a situation and a desire to end an interaction by using visual cues. These are depicted on this ladder of aggression. Recognizing the lower-rung gestures is important so a perceived stress or threat to a dog can be removed sooner.



Source: Shepherd K. Ladder of aggression. In: Horwitz D, Mills DS. *BSAVA Manual of Canine and Feline Behavioural Medicine*, 2nd ed. 2009.

Protracted Warning Signs

□ “Whale eye”



□ Short, pursed lip



This is a preliminary aggressive threat. The dog's ears are back, she's giving a direct stare and her lips are pulled over her teeth.



The threat is more serious now. Her muzzle extends forward and she's giving a low growl.



Now she's wrinkled her muzzle to expose her front teeth. She's growling loudly and preparing to lunge forward and attack.

□ Lip licking/tongue flicking



□ Yawning



Protracted Warning Signs

□ Ears back



□ Tail tucked



□ Worry lines



□ Curved body posture



Protracted Warning Signs

- Baring teeth



- Lies down, leg up



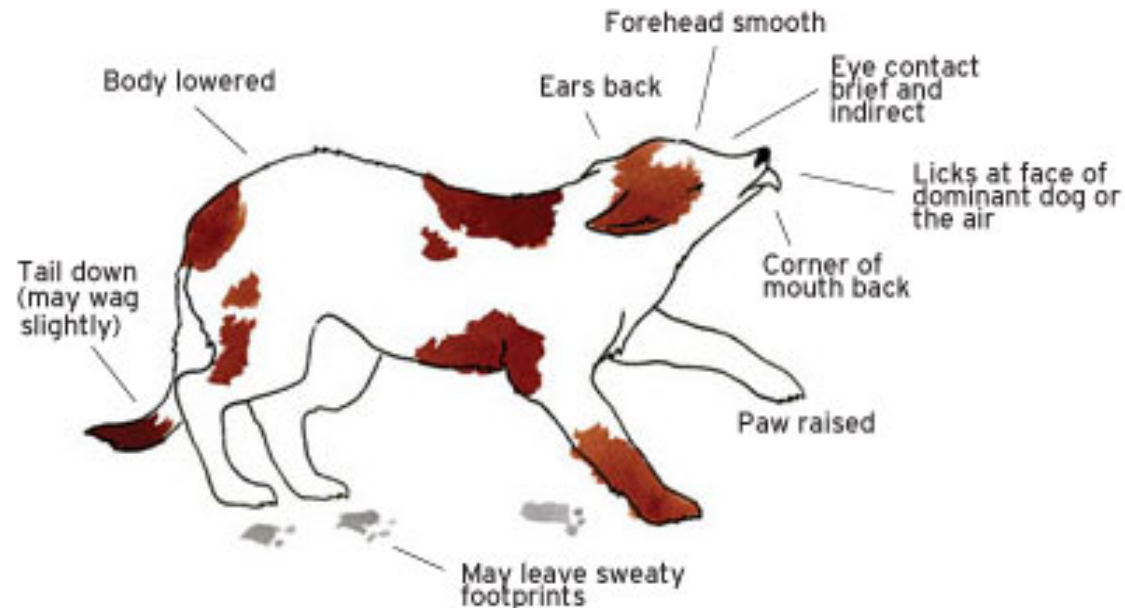
- Growling

- Snapping



Don't push your foster dog this far!

Conflicted body language



Hard vs. Soft Features



Soft



Hard

Remember: This doesn't mean a dog with "soft" features won't ever bite, or a dog with "hard" features is aggressive!



Hard vs. Soft Features

Ears forward
Direct, intense
eye contact

Tension in lip

Body forward

Ears slightly
back
Worry lines

Eye contact less
intense

Body slightly
back



*We can see the difference
between hard and soft
features in our pets at home,
too!*

Signs a dog is becoming more comfortable:

- ❑ Softening features
- ❑ Tail wag
- ❑ Army crawling towards you
- ❑ Longer lip
- ❑ Eating treats
- ❑ Slowly approaching



How to interact with a shy dog

- ❑ Gauge the dog's body language before approaching
- ❑ Keep the side of your body towards the dog
- ❑ Avoid prolonged eye contact
- ❑ Gently toss high value treats



How to interact with a shy dog



- ❑ Pay attention to protracted warning signs
- ❑ If dog is giving you warning signs, do not keep approaching
- ❑ Do not corner the dog or force them to interact with you
- ❑ Always let the dog approach you first
- ❑ Keep every interaction neutral or positive

Body handling

- ❑ Keep movements slow and calm
- ❑ Don't lean over the dog or reach over them
- ❑ Keep a close eye on body language
- ❑ Start by gently petting dog's chest



Looming over a shy dog can be very intimidating! This puppy is giving nice protracted warning signs that he is uncomfortable.

Fostering a shy dog

- Keep your foster dog in a controlled environment
 - ▣ Single room at first
 - ▣ On-leash in home and yard until your foster will readily approach you
 - ▣ Careful around home entrances/exits
 - ▣ Never chase or try to grab a fleeing shy dog



Fostering a shy dog

- Always carry high value treats when interacting with your shy dog
 - ▣ Reward your foster dog every time they make progress
 - ▣ Have treats available when meeting new people
 - ▣ A treat pouch is a great investment for convenience
- Can feed meals by hand if foster dog is very food motivated

Fostering a shy dog

- ❑ Always work under threshold
- ❑ Progress should be in slow, small increments
- ❑ Be aware of your foster's triggers



Just because you think a dog would like something, doesn't mean they will! Don't force your foster to "have fun."

Fostering a shy dog

- Once your dog is comfortable meeting you, try introducing your dog to new people in controlled settings
- Give new people instructions on how to safely greet your foster dog
- If someone is overwhelming your foster dog, please intervene
 - ▣ You are your foster dog's best advocate!



Fostering a shy dog

- Safety first!
 - ▣ If your foster is showing forward aggression in your home, please let the Foster Coordinator know immediately
 - ▣ If you are uncomfortable for any reason, please communicate so we can keep you safe
- Be aware of trigger stacking and flooding
 - ▣ Don't try to socialize your terrified dog by going to a busy park, café, etc.

*Big crowds can be terrifying
for a shy dog!*



Fostering a shy dog

- Keep Foster Coordinator updated on progress and any setbacks
 - ▣ A weekly email update is good if all is going smoothly
 - ▣ Please reach out promptly if your foster dog is declining or you encounter any problems
 - ▣ Report all bites to the Foster Coordinator immediately!

What if my foster gets loose in the house or yard?

- Stay calm, do not chase
- Try to lure your foster with high value food or treats
- Try to confine them to a smaller area by shutting doors behind them
- Offer a safe hiding space and see if they choose to run in on their own
 - ▣ Ex. An open kennel covered in blankets
 - ▣ Calmly close the kennel door and carry kennel back inside or in their room, do not pull dog from kennel

What if my foster dog isn't making progress?

- ❑ Keep in mind progress will be slow
- ❑ Regular updates and communication are key
- ❑ May need to adjust behavior modification plan
- ❑ May need a different environment



When will my foster dog be ready for adoption?

- Behavior Coordinator and Foster Coordinator will determine if your foster dog is ready for adoption, needs to continue socialization in foster care, or needs to come back to the shelter/be transferred to another foster home
- Some dogs may not make enough progress to be adoptable at ACAS
 - ▣ May still be candidates for rescue placement
 - ▣ Very rarely, may not be candidates for rescue or adoption
 - ▣ Final decision making rests with ACAS staff

Questions?

Thank you for helping some
of our neediest shelter pets
get ready for adoption!

When can we get
started???

