Back to Basics: Dealing with Challenging Behaviors in the Shelter Dog Walker Volunteer Info Session

Angela Schmorrow, CPDT-KA, KPA-CTP, CSB-D
April 2020
Unlabel Me!

- Behavior is communication.
- Behavior is responding to the environment to get one’s needs met.
- Behavior is not “good” or “bad.”
- Behavior continues because it works.
- A dog is NOT his or her behavior.
What are some common challenges in shelter?

- Jumping
- Barking
- Excessive pulling
- Biting leash, grabbing clothes
- Reactivity (barking, lunging)
- Mounting
- Others?
Why is the dog doing that?

- The ABC's of Behavior

  - Antecedent
  - Behavior
  - Consequence
**ABC’s of Behavior**

- **Antecedent**: Something in the environment that triggers the behavior
- **Behavior**: What the animal does to influence the outcome in that environment
- **Consequence**: What happens to make that behavior more or less likely in the future
  - **Reinforcement**: Makes the behavior more likely to happen
  - **Punishment**: Makes the behavior less likely to happen
- **Reinforcement drives behavior!**
What are the antecedents we often are dealing with?

- Noise
- Visual stimulation
- People/dogs passing by kennel
- Being approached
- Being handled/harnessed
- Being moved
- Lack of choice/opportunity
- Extended confinement
- Extended isolation
- Lack of sleep
What are often consequences to the behaviors?

- Social interaction/attention
- Removal of a stressor
- Opportunity to leave kennel (or return)
- Opportunity to increase or decrease distance
- Increased stimulation
- Creating some change in the environment
How do we change behavior?

- Change the antecedent
- Change the consequence

Think about the function of the behavior! What is the consequence the animal is using the current behavior for? What other behavior could result in same consequence?
Change the Antecedents

- Kennel placement
- Visual barriers
- Lowering guillotines
- Providing incompatible behaviors (example, eating cheese from a Licki-Mat)
- Equipment (metal leash, harness)
- Assess environment/time and plan routes
- Be flexible and change course
- Avoid problem areas/activities – choose what the dog most needs
- Communicate with others! Let people know exactly what you need to keep your dog successful
Reinforce “Replacement” Behaviors

- Standing still
- Sit
- Hand target
- Eye contact
- Moving forward
- Sniffing ground

Remember: The behavior you choose to use may depend on the function of the original behavior.
Why We Avoid Aversives

- A punisher is anything that stops a behavior.
- Anything that stops a behavior is aversive.
- Anything that is aversive will create emotional fallout.
- This emotional fallout can lead to worse problems and put you in danger.
- Simply stopping a behavior is not enough – something else will fill that void.
- Remember that frustration is also aversive and can lead to aggression/escalation.
Beware of Behavior Chains

- Example: dog bites leash, we trade for a treat, dog bites leash, we trade for a treat, etc.
- Be proactive – reinforce desired behavior early and frequently.
- Don’t let the problem behavior start before you respond.
- If you need to use food to interrupt when things go wrong, that is fine – but have a plan of what to do next.
Shelter Examples
Entering Kennel

- Reward calm behavior from outside kennel – anything calmer than what was occurring previously.
- Toss treats or licki mat into the kennel before you enter to prevent door crowding.
- Video: https://youtu.be/eXjDfBfvs90
Harnessing

- How we do this matters!
- Be predictable – animals feel safest when they know what to expect.
- Minimize invasive handling
  - Dog moves into harness
  - No reaching over, wrapping arms around
- Video: [https://youtu.be/kqXm6HyWr_Q](https://youtu.be/kqXm6HyWr_Q)
Jumpy/Mouthy Dogs

- Reinforce for head forward, movement forward: [https://youtu.be/aRKKVKKZqvY](https://youtu.be/aRKKVKKZqvY)
- Treats on ground
- 1-2-3 game
  - Pattern game from Leslie McDevitt’s “Control Unleashed” program
  - Gives a predictable pattern for dog to focus on to reduce stress, over-arousal
  - [https://youtu.be/bs5trKsb8ak](https://youtu.be/bs5trKsb8ak)
- Why does this work?
  - Creates predictability of when and where reinforcement will be available.
  - Reduces frustration that leads to problematic behavior.
  - Gives them something to focus on rather than triggers for stress in the environment.
Dogs That Don’t Want To Walk

- Keep your shoulders and feet pointed where you want to go.
- If possible, let the dog make their own choice (going back to kennel instead of walking, taking a different route).
- Build momentum. Get a cheering squad.
- 1-2-3 Game
- If possible, pause and wait for any motion forward and reward.
- If necessary, lure with treats on the ground.
- When all else fails, get staff. Do not drag or pick up.
- For dogs that don’t want to return to kennel, get in habit of hiding food rewards as you leave for dog to find upon return.
Loose Leash Walking

- Included by popular demand, but this is not top priority.
- Why not?
  - Challenging behavior to teach even dogs in a home (high reinforcement history, lack of consistency, unclear criteria, physically awkward)
  - Even harder when dog is motivated to avoid stressful situation
  - Studies have not shown it to be an influencing factor in adoption decisions
- Generally, easier to manage with walking equipment in a shelter environment
LLW: Step 1

- Three steps backwards: https://youtu.be/QOfp_5uAcIA
LLW: Step 2

Moving forward: https://youtu.be/bvRZfqn1ruI
LLW Tips in the Shelter

- Do not work on this in the red zone or in high traffic areas
- Practice in low-stimulation areas (upper play yard, Ed center)
Trouble-Shooting
Be Prepared!

- Have the correct walking tools
- Have treats and a toy
- Read the notes
- Read the dog
- In Holding: Take a radio
- Be familiar with your environment
  - Where could you change direction?
  - Where could you get help fastest?
  - Where could you contain a dog?
  - Where are the emergency stations?
- Assess current conditions: number of walkers/guests out, time of day, environmental conditions
Be Self Aware

- How are you using your body language?
- Are you talking too much?
- Are you rushing?
- Are you making assumptions?
- Physical limitations?
- Current environment
- Current stress level
- Personal triggers and biases
When Things Go Wrong

- **Calmly** interrupt if necessary (the behavior is dangerous, destructive, self-rewarding, etc.)
  - Removing reinforcement is enough – no need for verbal or physical corrections, which can be dangerous
- Change the environment
- Lower criteria for reinforcement
- Increase rate of reinforcement and/or value of reward
- Behavioral momentum: Ask for a highly likely behavior (a favorite trick, etc.) before continuing
- JUST THROW FOOD!!
- Ask for help/stop the walk
If You Feel Unsafe

- Call for help
  - Be specific – where you are, what is happening ("Loose Dog," "I've been bitten")
- Stay calm. Breathe!
- Protect vital areas (neck, abdomen, face)
- Get away from the dog
If You Witness Someone Needing Help

- Get yourself and your dog to safety
- Call for help
  - Continue to call
  - Again, be specific – where person is, what is happening
The Mechanical Tips and Tricks
Body Positioning

- Always be able to move quickly
  - Don’t kneel down
  - Stay on feet
  - Don’t get cornered
  - Don’t let dog get between you and exit

- Sideways position
  - Boxer stance
  - Able to shift away quickly
  - Less likely to be knocked down
  - Less threatening to dog

- Don’t put yourself between dog and potential triggers
Leash Handling

- Leash Lock Hold
  - “Thumb through loop”
  - “Leash around index finger”
  - “Close hand on leash”
  - “Second hand on leash”
  - “Hands at core”
Leash Handling

- Hands at core
- Little slack between hands
- Leash straight down to dog
- Short leash in tight areas
- Both hands on leash
- Accordion Hold

DON'T:
- Wrap handle around wrist
- Wrap leash around hand multiple times – use “accordion hold” to pick up slack
- Take second hand off leash
- Let go of leash and stand on it while cleaning up after dog
Emergency Situations

- Straight arm
- Run leash around something ("back tie")
- "Feed" item to dog
- Get something between you and dog
- Climb higher
- Get yourself in corner so dog can’t get behind you
- Stay upright
- Keep from shaking head
Questions?

- angelas@hshv.org

- Resource: Michael Shikashio and Trish McMillan “Safety and Defensive Handling with Aggressive Dogs”