

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.

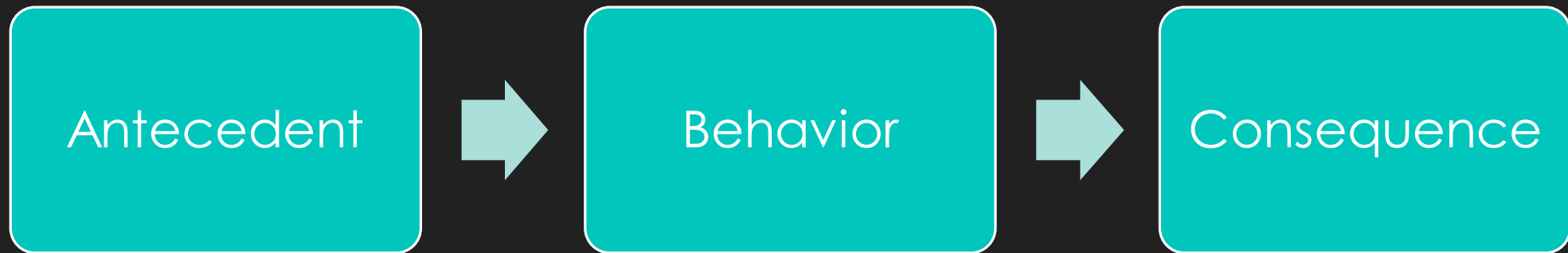


What are some common challenges in shelter?

- Jumping
- Barking
- Excessive pulling
- Biting leash, grabbing clothes
- Reactivity (barking, lunging)
- Mounting
- Others?

Why is the dog doing that?

- The ABC's of Behavior



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

Jumpy/Mouthy Dogs

- Reinforce for head forward, movement forward: <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>
- 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/bvRZfqnlruI>

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”



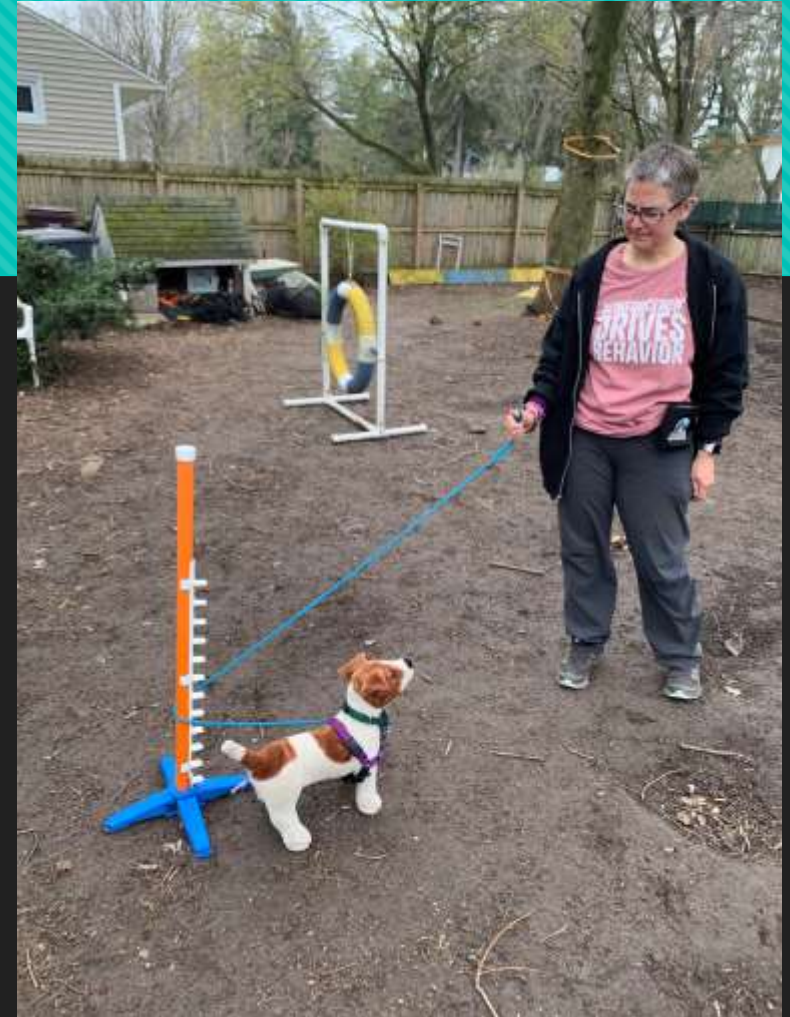
Leash Handling

- 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”