

# Dealing with Challenging Behaviors in the Shelter

## Dog Walker Volunteer Info Session

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# 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.



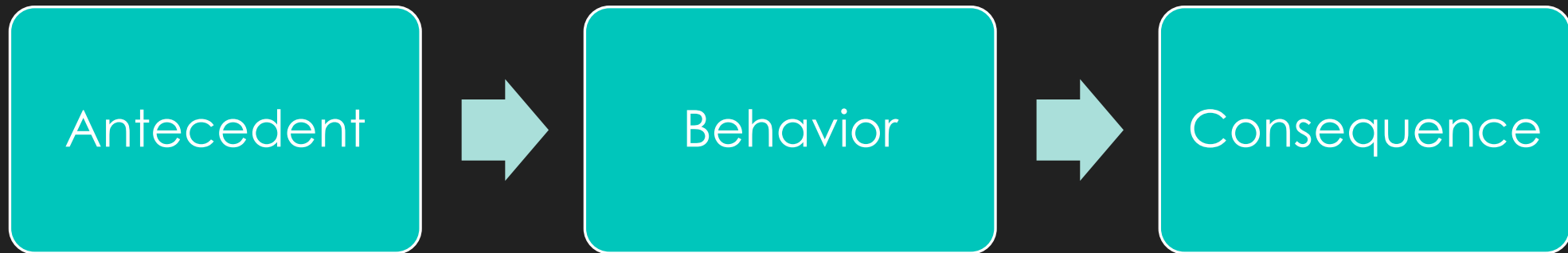
# What are some common challenges in shelter?

- Jumping
- Barking
- Excessive pulling
- Biting leash, grabbing clothes
- Reactivity (barking, lunging)
- Mounting
- Not wanting to walk/return to kennel
- 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.



# Why Ignoring Doesn't Work

- Behavior may be unsafe
- Behavior may be self-reinforcing
- Extinction process very unpleasant for all involved
- Behavior continues to be rehearsed, possibly for long duration
- Creates very persistent behavior
- Frustration is very aversive, and may lead to escalation
- Doesn't tell the animal what TO do to meet their needs

# What to do instead?

- Try to set up environment to make it unlikely
- Single episode of “non-contingent” reinforcement and interrupt, redirect, and help you start over



# Arousal Red Flags

- Head, tail up (maybe wagging rapidly), ears forward, focused stare, fur piloerected
- Rapid, “frantic” movement, unable to hold still
- Jumping/height-seeking
- Barking/vocalizing
- Biting
- Repetitive behavior
- Seemingly function-less behavior
- Refusal of food, not responding to cues
- “0-100”

# Keep Dogs Out of High Arousal

- Keep body language calm
- Minimize touching/talking/eye contact
- Reduce other stimuli
- Encourage sniffing/foraging activity
- Avoid high intensity activity
  - These dogs do NOT need MORE.
- Find ways to allow them to decompress
  - Enrichment, sniff walks, puzzle toys, training, quiet time



# 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>
- Treats on ground
- Bowl Game
- 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
- Bowl 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.



# 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
- Bring a buddy

# 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



# Defensive Handling



# Body Positioning

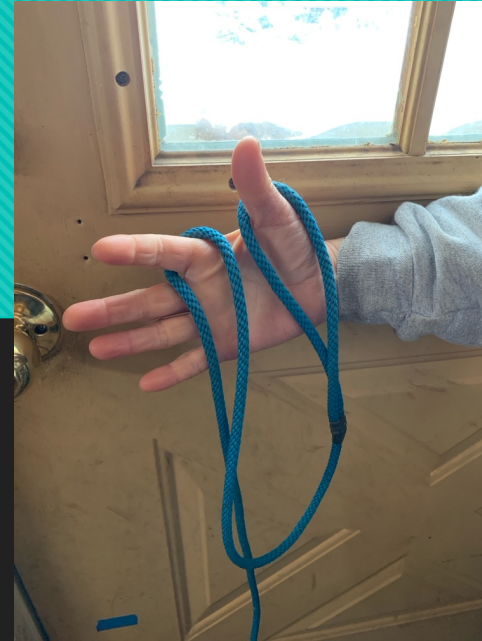
- Always be able to move quickly
  - Don't kneel down
  - Stay on feet
  - Don't get cornered
  - Don't let dog get between you and exit
- Sideways position
  - Boxer stance
  - Able to shift away quickly
  - Less likely to be knocked down
  - Less threatening to dog
- Don't put yourself between dog and potential triggers





# Leash Handling

- Leash Lock Hold
  - Thumb through loop
  - Leash around index finger
  - 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





# Further Viewing

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