

Whatcom Humane Society

Dog TLC Skills Class

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Dogs at the shelter are here temporarily. It is our job to help keep them exercised, stimulated and loved. Mental stimulation uses 25% more oxygen than physical activity, so for those dogs with high energy levels, training is very important to keep them mentally fit and tired. Dogs who know basic skills are more likely to be adopted and to stay in new homes than dogs with no skills.

Before you go into see a new dog, always read kennel notes and the previous walkers' notes. **Always** record your experience on the volunteer sheet. Report any concerning behavior to Animal Care Staff.

Body language: watch for stress signals, especially clusters of stress signals such as paw raise, licking and yawning, arched back, tucked tail exhibited together. Clusters of stress signals indicate increasing stress levels in the dog. When you see stress signals, think about what **you** are doing (are you making direct eye contact? Moving quickly? Leaning over the dog? Petting the dog on top of the head? Moving toward the dog?). Slow down, back off, take a deep breath, turn sideways to the dog, and give the dog some space. Toy breeds may just blink over and over rather than showing several different signals clustered together.

Mild stress or displacement signals (dog displays familiar behaviors out of context that they connect with pleasure and therefore increase their sense of security):

Marking territory

Fool around (acting very silly, over the top playful, "zoomies")

Stretching

Yawning

Shaking off

Licking lips

Sniffing the ground

Licking genitals

Drinking water

Distance decreasing signals (Please come closer, I love you, scratch my ears, play with me, etc):

Play bow

Easy, wagging tail in a circle or whole butt wagging

Submissive grin, long commissure (length of mouth)

Blinking eyes

Squinty eyes

Floppy, relaxed roll over

Other signs of relaxation:

Relaxed face (frown between ears has relaxed, wrinkles around mouth are relaxing, decreased panting, neutral wagging tail (desire to interact), soft eyes, relaxed body, ears neutral or back but not plastered back on head, paw lift.

Signs of arousal: (I'm excited, may progress instantly to aggression or over aroused play)

Ears forward

Weight forward

Direct stare

Penile crowning

Hackles up

Increase in activity

Mouth closes

Mounting or humping

Danger signals: BACK OFF—DON'T GET CLOSER!!!—may erupt instantly into aggression

High fast tail wag

Tail flagged over back, with tip pointing forward (depends on breed of dog & how they carry tail)

Ground scratching

Freezing

Very brief look away

Whale eye

Head and neck low: resource guarding is usually cause

'Tap out': **don't confuse this with the submissive distance decreasing signal of roll over.** Dog curls down onto floor slowly, shoulder down, then each vertebrae of back, tail may be between legs. This is a fearful signal that can suddenly explode into aggression if you approach.

Other signs of stress / fear: frowny face with wrinkles between ears and around mouth—face looks tight and stressed, ears plastered back on head, arched back, tail tucked, turning back, turning head away, body tight, panting).

To reduce stress in dogs: Avoid bending over dogs, hugging them, patting them on top of their heads. Rather, stroke their chests, backs, or shoulders. Be calm and reassuring with them. Go slowly when putting on their equipment. Always ask: "How is this for you?" when interacting with them.

Keeping dogs calm in their kennels: when looking at dogs from outside their kennels, only reinforce behaviors that are calm. E.g. don't pay attention to dogs who are barking, jumping up etc. Turn away until they are quiet and have 4 paws on the floor. Then praise them, smile, and give them a treat under the door etc.

Every interaction is a training interaction for both you and the dog. Pay attention to what you are telling them both by initiating behavior and by responding to them—be calm, firm, gentle. Keep your voice low and friendly. Smile. The more excited or aroused a dog is, the calmer and firmer you need to be. “Firm” means keeping verbal cues simple, not engaging in their behaviors, being aloof and keeping expectations clear, rewarding only when they do what you are asking of them. It doesn't mean raising your voice or forcing them to do what you want them to.

Entering the kennels: Only enter the kennel when the dog is sitting or has all 4 feet are on the floor. Brace the kennel door with your foot when you unlatch the karabiner. Once in the kennel, only **interact** with the dog when all 4 feet are on the floor or when the dog is sitting. You may need to lure them into a sit with a cookie immediately upon entering the kennel if they are very excited.

With dogs you don't know, talk to them from outside the kennel reassuringly first and give them treats when they are calm. IF they are worried—ears back, tail tucked, back arched, or excited, barking at you, and jumping up, work with them first from outside the kennel until their stress signals decrease. Kennels are small spaces for dogs to meet and greet you.

Harnessing:

- **Excited dogs:** Have the harness ready to place on the dog and a cookie in your hand before you enter the kennel. Attaching the leash to the harness prior to entering can be helpful. Lure the dog's head through the harness with a cookie as soon as you enter the kennel. You may need to switch sides so that you can reach under the dog to grasp the band that goes under the chest to complete your task. Toss cookies on the floor to keep him calm while you do up the quick release snap. This may take more than one try. Just maneuver him back into position and try again if you can't get the snap done up the first time. Avoid wrapping your arms around the dog to do up the harness but rather reach under the chest/belly as you would to saddle horse.
- **Fearful dogs:** If the dog is fearful, move slowly and stand sideways to him until the dog approaches you in a relaxed manner. Toss him treats rather than trying to get him to approach you. Crouching down may help, but this may make some dogs more anxious. It also places your face closer to the dog's mouth. Once he is approaching you with interest, you should allow him to sniff you without trying to touch or feed him. You may drop treats when he is finished, and if he stays close, offer him treats from your hand. If he is fine with that, feed him treats off the harness, then have him take treats through the opening of his harness, gradually increasing the distance that his nose pushes through each time. Remove the harness completely between attempts to put the harness on him and if he is getting increasingly stressed, take a break or leave the kennel. Removing the harness from his head

between attempts to put it on him will decrease his stress, and in addition will give him practice at having his harness moved toward his face. You may not be able to get the harness on him the first day that you go to see him. Even though you are not walking the dog, you are building their trust and confidence in humans.

Returning to the kennel:

- Most dogs go back in their kennels easily and tossing treats on the floor will entertain them until you can get out. Show him the cookies and be sure you have high enough value treats that he will actually be interested in them. Be ready with your hand on the lever to exit the kennel before you toss the treats so that you can slip out while he is distracted.
- Some dogs may do better with a stuffed Kong to keep them busy while you exit. Stuff with a combo of kibble (soaked or not) and peanut butter. Don't use too much peanut butter as it is bad for them, but dollops to help the kibble adhere between layers of kibble is high value for most dogs. Get the dog interested in the Kong, and then place it on the floor and leave.
- Some dogs may be escape artists. You can try taking them into the Get Acquainted room and attach their leash to their collar only. Toss treats into their kennel and **without entering** the kennel, unclip the leash and close the door when the dog goes in to investigate. You may need to get help with some dogs to get them back into the kennel either from other volunteers or from animal care staff.

Walking dogs: ALWAYS TAKE LOTS OF TREATS WITH YOU (as well as plastic bags)

Leaving the kennel:

- Always check for other dogs/ people/kids before exiting the kennel. Keep your body between the kennels and the dog you are walking. Keep your dog on a SHORT leash. Feeding treats, holding a Kong for them to lick, or tossing treats on the floor ahead of them may help to get them past the kennels without lunging and barking. Do the same when returning your dog to his kennel.
- Always check for dogs on the other side of the doors before going through a doorway. Be sure all 4 paws are on the floor before going through a door. Lure the dog back to you with treats as soon as you are through the door so that he is facing you and you can check out the environment before proceeding.
- Keep your dog on the right side when exiting past the stray kennels and exercise yard. Move them quickly past the exercise yard, tossing treats on the ground to distract them as you pass, especially if a reactive dog is in the yard. You may need to wait until a dog is put away before going through the gate if both dogs are reactive. It is not good for either dog to be placed in that situation.

Increased arousal levels: Anything can cause increased arousal levels. The higher the arousal level, the more difficult to control the dog is and the closer to aggressive behavior the dog is. Shelter dogs are stressed, so it is important, especially until you know a dog well, to keep their arousal levels low.

Things that can increase arousal levels:

- High energy on the handler's part—**running**, excited voices, high squeaky voice, intentionally getting the dog excited by rough housing, clapping hands etc.
- Bending over the dog, touching a dog who doesn't like to be touched, too much training, boredom.
- Walking close to another dog –this can be excitement because the dog either likes other dogs, or has fear based reactivity.
- Seeing another dog running in the exercise yard (if you have a dog in the exercise yard and a volunteer is having a difficult time walking a dog past, STOP playing with your dog, have them sit and feed them cookies.
- Loud noises in the distance
- Food rewards
- Frustration
- Excited play in the yard

To decrease arousal levels:

- Breathe deeply
- Slow down
- Stand up straight
- Speak slowly and calmly in a low voice
- Don't get excited
- Turn sideways
- Avoid direct eye contact
- Be aware of keeping arousal levels low with dogs you haven't walked before until you get to know them.
- Avoid other walkers with dogs.
- Don't take a dog you haven't walked before into the exercise area.

Exercise yard: I would recommend getting to know dogs first before taking them in the exercise yard. Some over-stimulated dogs can be overwhelming with jumping up and excitement when off leash.

- Don't take dogs out to the exercise yard within an hour of eating or offer large amounts of water as strenuous exercise with full stomachs can cause bloat in dogs—40% fatality even if treated immediately.
- Also, be very careful about exercising dogs in the heat. They are very inefficient at cooling themselves and regulating temperature and can get hyperthermia much more easily than humans. This can also be fatal.

Training skills:

- **Marker word:** The marker word (“yes”) marks the precise instant your dog does the behavior that you are looking for. It is empowered by following the marker with a treat within 2 seconds EVERY TIME. The marker word speeds learning and stimulates the ‘seeking behavior’ in the brain which makes your dog excited about learning. It also marks good behavior instantly. Many shelter dogs are too stressed to take treats. Marking the behavior and letting them sniff, give them attention or anything else the dog finds pleasurable is also very effective.
- **Release word:** “That’ll do”. Exercise finished.
- **Attention:** Have the dog sit in front of you to begin this exercise. As soon as he makes eye contact, mark and treat. If he is having difficulty making eye contact, lure his eyes up to your face using a cookie. Mark and treat when he makes eye contact. (A dog who makes eye contact with visitors is more likely to get adopted).
- **Cookie sit:** Place the cookie on your dog’s nose and move it slowly back toward his tail. As his haunches hit the ground tell him “sit”, give him the cookie and release him by using your release word and throwing a cookie on the floor a few feet away.
- **Cookie down:** With your dog in a sit, place a cookie on his nose and move it slowly from his nose down to his toes and slide it along the ground away from him. As soon as his elbows touch the ground, say “down” and give him the cookie by dropping it on the ground. You do not want him to get up until you release him with a click and his release word so you may need to drop several cookies between his paws initially to keep him down. Praise and repeat the word ‘down’ while in the down position. If he is very reluctant to go down, mark and treat approximations such as one paw extending forward, going half way down etc. Praise and release using your release word.
- **Take it/Leave it:** Offer your dog a treat and tell her ‘take it’. Repeat 2 or three times. Then, holding your hand steady, ask her in a light voice to ‘leave it’. Do not release the treat. Wait until she backs off in frustration. Immediately mark and tell her ‘take it’ as you give her the treat. Do a few more ‘take its’ and then ‘leave it’. Repeat.
- **Find it:** Toss treats on the ground and point to the treat asking him to “find it”.

- **Step on the leash:** Use this only if you need to protect yourself, not as a routine way to handle jumping up. Step on the leash firmly. Be sure that there is no slack between your foot and the clasp on the dog's collar. Hold the leash handle firmly in your hand. The leash should be tight but not pulling the dog's head toward the ground. Take some deep breaths, turn away from the dog, and when he is calm walk on and toss treats on the ground, asking him to "find it".
- **Leash walking:** All dogs are much more relaxed on a loose leash. Tight leashes increase anxiety and aggression in dogs. The following exercises are ways to teach loose leash walking. Some dogs may do better with one than the other. Try them out.
- **Loose leash walking:**
 - Lure/reward heeling: Lure your dog into heel position with treats and praise for short distances then allow him to range and sniff for short periods. Do not move forward if the leash is taut. Do not jerk on the leash. The dog gets rewarded with a treat or moving forward for returning to you.
 - 'Red light/Green light': Walk with your dog until the leash is taut. As soon as it is taut, stop. Do not move forward until the leash loosens. Praise and move forward as soon as it is loose.
 - Change speed and direction: Make rapid changes in speed and direction, moving smoothly. Do not jerk on the leash. Praise your dog as soon as s/he is with you. Your dog will start to follow you because s/he is confused by your behavior.
 - Baby steps: Start by luring your dog into a sit. Praise. Ignore all other behavior until your dog sits. Take one step, stand still until s/he sits again. Repeat until your dog sits promptly with each step. Then take 2 steps and repeat, then 5 steps, then 8 steps. Your dog can be lured into a sit each time but eventually should sit each time you stop. With some very excitable dogs, this may be the only way to proceed.
- **Recall (Come):** Say your dog's name clearly then 'come'. Mark as soon as he turns to approach you and move away from him. Treat with a jackpot and praise when he gets to you. Use the word 'Come' whenever your dog is coming toward you.
- **Jumping up:** When anticipating that your dog will jump, give another cue such as "sit" that is incompatible with jumping up. Praise. Walk on calmly

Turn away from him and completely withdraw from him emotionally and physically. Walk on when all 4 paws are on the ground.

Step on the leash, take a few deep breaths, talk calmly to the dog and walk on calmly back to the shelter when the dog has settled, keeping arousal levels very low.

Toss treats on the ground ahead of the dog and help him "find it".

If you are out walking and you can't stop the dog jumping and mouthing (rarely, some dogs will get into a frenzy of jumping and mouthing/biting due to a combination of stress and pushiness), step on the leash (see above) or, if you're close enough, attach him to one of the posts.

Call the shelter on your cell for help (360-733-2080 ext 0). If the shelter is closed, call 911 and they will connect you with dispatch at animal control. Shouting at the dog or pushing him off will increase his arousal level and worsen the problem.

Report all jumping, mouthing, biting and humping to one of the trainers or staff. If one of the trainers is not there, be sure to tell one of the staff **and** write it up in your notes.

- **Mouthing or biting the leash:** Shorten the leash. Work on Take it/leave it. Decrease arousal levels by withdrawing from the dog physically and emotionally and don't engage in the game. Use a tug toy to distract the dog. If you need to, attach to a post and wait for the dog to calm down. Turn sideways, take deep breaths, talk to him calmly. Tossing treats on the ground can help. Once he is calm, move on and use "find it" to keep him calm. A chain leash can be used. Report this in your notes and let a trainer or staff know.