

Save the Animals Foundation

Dog Handling for Shelter Volunteers



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INTRODUCTION TO DOG HANDLING

People who volunteer at STAF love animals, and most volunteers on the dog side of the shelter feel comfortable handling dogs because they have experience with animals in their homes. However, it is important to remember that animals in a shelter may not act like the pets in our homes. The shelter is a stressful and unfamiliar environment for dogs, particularly when they first arrive. There are no familiar smells, bedding, people, or noises, and it takes time for dogs to adjust to all of these changes.

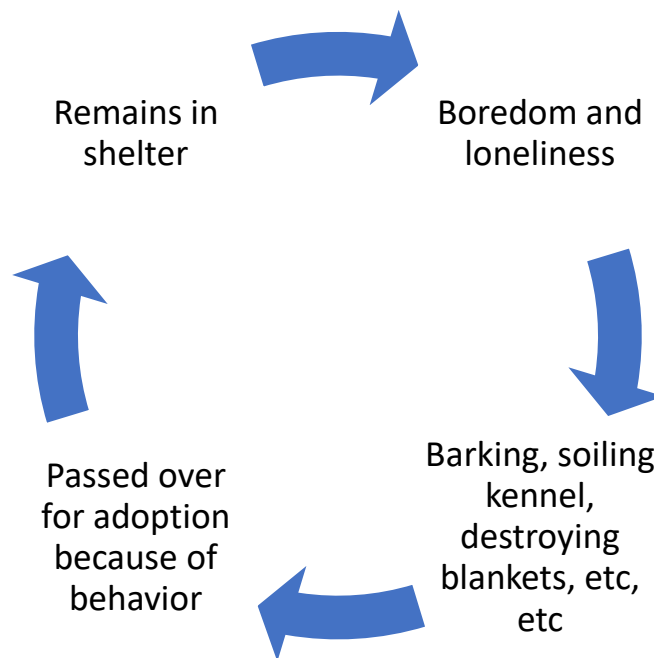
In addition to the stress of the new environment, the dogs all have some history that can affect their behavior in the shelter. The dog may have been a stray animal and this is the first time he/she is living inside, may have lived with one family his/her whole life and is now abandoned by that family, or may even have been neglected or abused. Whatever the history, these experiences are bound to affect the dog as he/she adjusts to the new environment and new faces at STAF.

One of our goals at STAF is to provide the best home possible for our animals until we can find him/her a permanent home. It is important for volunteers to recognize the signs of stress and fearful behavior to keep our dogs as comfortable as possible, as well as to optimize the safety of our volunteers and other visitors.

This handbook will introduce some of the more common modern concepts of dog handling. Please be patient and open-minded as you read through the information...some of these concepts may be new to you even if you've had dogs for many years and have lots of dog handling experience. The science of dog behavior and dog handling has changed a lot in recent years! We will include many examples of healthy, fearful, anxious, and/or aggressive dog behavior and body language, but these concepts may be better learned in a video format or through direct observation of animals. We encourage each of you to seek more education about this topic, and we will provide a list of trusted resources at the end of the manual.

DOG ENRICHMENT AT STAF

While we strive to provide the best environment possible for the dogs at STAF, a shelter is simply not the same as a home. Dogs can easily become stressed, bored and/or lonely, and these feelings can lead to behaviors that are less attractive to potential adopters. This can lead to a vicious cycle of sorts:



Enrichment activities can help break or even prevent this vicious cycle. By providing stimulating activity, engagement of the senses, and a distraction from the stressful environment of the shelter, enrichment helps promote the mental health of our dogs, and it can go a long way toward avoiding those unwanted behaviors that can prevent or delay finding a permanent home.

As a volunteer, you can help provide our dogs with beneficial enrichment to keep them happier, healthier, and more adoptable. Enrichment activities can take many forms but should involve as many of the five senses as possible. Training is an excellent example of an enrichment activity. Teaching a dog new tricks is mentally stimulating and physically tiring, a great combination of benefits that can be achieved in a relatively short period of time! (See Trick Training section below.) Other examples of enrichment include:

- Taking the dog on a walk or run
- Car rides
- Exploring a new yard, park, walking trail, or other new environment
- Listening to music or movies
- Playing with different toys

- Interactions with other dogs
- Play groups with multiple dogs at STAF or at doggy daycare
- Access to durable chew toys
- Making a game out of mealtime (ie through use of “slow feeders” or “puzzle feeders”)
- Setting up treat-finding games in the yard, such as a series of cardboard boxes with treats inside or “Snuffle Mats” (a twisted blanket or towel with hidden treats rolled inside)
- In the Q Hut (attached to STAF), we have toys, rubber matting and agility equipment. Several of our dogs are learning how to run an agility course with volunteers who take them to training classes
- Indoor/outdoor runs: We rotate dogs in a couple of these runs, especially in nice weather, so they each get a turn of having the freedom to go outside into a small, individual, play yard, whenever they want.
- Play time, 1-3 times per shift, in the yards, with volunteers.
- Play time with other dogs: Volunteers also work hard to pair up as many dogs as possible, with doggie playmates, so they can expend LOTS of energy in the yards!
- **ACTIVITIES BOARD:** All dogs are monitored for extra time with volunteers -- walks, runs, home visits, trips to the park, quiet time, car rides, training, grooming, snuggle time, training sessions. By checking the activities board, each shift can ensure that every dog gets to partake in these special activities
- Special attention is paid to our “Long Term Residents”. These are dogs who have been at STAF for over a year. We make an extra effort to get them out of STAF, and particularly into volunteers’ homes, for a break from the shelter.

OUTSIDE ENRICHMENT SERVICES

STAF is fortunate to enjoy the support of many wonderful local dog businesses that provide enriching activities for our dogs outside of the shelter. Whenever possible, STAF dogs are matched to one or more of these activities to keep them mentally, physically, and socially stimulated, with the added benefit of getting them away from the shelter if only for a brief period. Those outside enrichment activities include:

- **DAY CARE:** Some doggy day care facilities give us free or discounted day care for STAF dogs. We have as many as 8 dogs going once or twice a week.
- **TRAINING:** Many of our dogs attend training classes or are trained individually by some amazing friends of the shelter
- **HOME VISITS:** All potential adoptive homes take our dogs on Home Visits prior to adoption, and our volunteers can also take dogs home for a night or two (or longer) to give them a break from the shelter environment. In this way there is no pressure as to whether the dog they have chosen will really fit in with their lifestyle and family.
 - **Volunteers** who have worked at STAF at least three months are encouraged to take our dogs on Home Visits to give the dogs a chance to relax and enjoy a couch and playtime. (Stress reducer)
- **OUTINGS:** There are many events throughout the year that welcome our STAF dogs. It is terrific PR for STAF, plus volunteers and dogs alike get to enjoy the activities. Volunteers have the added pleasure of knowing that the dogs are getting some very special one-on-one attention.

- **FOSTER CARE:** Some of our dogs are being cared for in the homes of volunteers. These are dogs who are old or have medical or behavioral issues, that make it very difficult for them to live comfortably in the shelter.
 - We are indebted to these very special volunteers.

STRESS REDUCTION AT STAF

We try to keep our shelter environment as low stress as possible through the following:

- Reduced wattage of emergency lighting and light bulb casings turned upside down produce almost completely dark kennels at night. There are no dogs who sleep under any lighting at night.
- Peaceful music...especially geared towards dog stress reduction
- TVs in almost all rooms ...dogs can watch the TVs during shifts and in between daytime shifts, but we do not leave the TVs on overnight
- Sound baffles in the Blue Room (biggest room)

Quiet Rooms are set up as special “mini shelters” for dogs who need a calmer, quieter environment away from the rest of the shelter population, especially dogs who are extremely frightened, frail, traumatized, injured, or recovering from surgery.

INTRODUCTION TO DOG BODY LANGUAGE

A dog with a wagging tail is not necessarily friendly, nor is a growling dog necessarily vicious. It is important to understand what a shelter dog is telling us to ensure that we create a safe environment for dogs and volunteers.

Take the time to observe the dog first without direct interaction.

Observe the whole picture – Look at the dog's ears, mouth, tail, and body position *in combination* to most accurately determine the dog's level of tension and state of mind

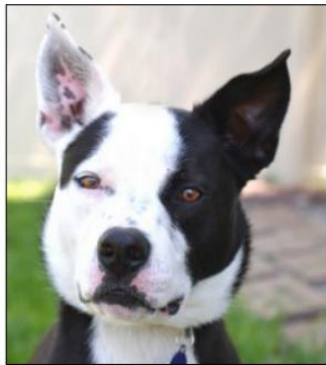
If at any time you are unsure of or worried about the dog's behavior, return the dog to the kennel or call another volunteer for assistance.

Let's examine some common examples of body language, moving from the top down.

A dog's ears:

It can sometimes be difficult to interpret body language based upon ear positioning alone. Dogs have a wide variety of ear types, and we cannot interpret the ears of a Basset hound in the same way we might try to interpret the cropped ears of a miniature schnauzer. However, there are some general rules of thumb (rules of ear perhaps) based mostly upon the direction at the base of the ears:

- Ears perked up and forward – Indicates that the dog is alert and may be curious or interested in what he/she is looking at
- Neutral position with ears pointed towards the sides: Dog is likely relaxed
- Ears positioned slightly backward – Likely indicates that the dog is cautious
- Ears flattened against the back of the head – Dog may be afraid or feeling defensive



EARS UP, FORWARD

Alert



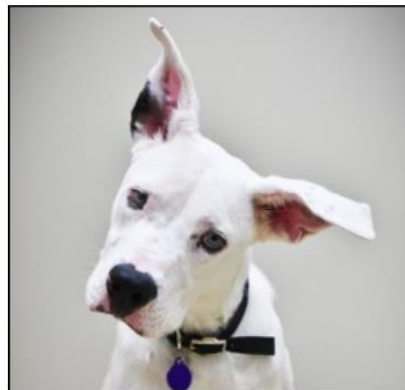
EARS BACK

Submissive or Cautious



FLAT BACK

Fearful or defensive



AIRPLANE EARS

Mixed emotion

A dog's eyes:

Pay attention to the white part of the eye, where the dog is focusing his gaze, and the intensity of the gaze

- “Whale eye”: A tense dog may display round eyes with a lot of the white showing around the outside
- Dilated pupils can indicate fear or arousal, Eyes may appear “glassy”
- Squinting: A relaxed dog may squint, making the eyes almond-shaped with little white seen around the outside
- Winking: Winking is usually seen in playful, happy dogs
- Avoidance of eye contact: This can be a sign of stress or discomfort
- Hard stare: May be a precursor to aggression



WHALE EYES
Tense or nervous



ALMOND SHAPED
Relaxed

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<https://www.caninecoaching.com/canine-body-language-the-eyes/>

A dog's mouth and facial expressions

We can tell a lot from a dog's mouth and facial expressions:

- Relaxed – A relaxed dog will have a relaxed face without tension! The mouth may be slightly open with the tongue partly out as the dog pants, and the corners of the mouth may be turned upward a bit.
- Fearful or tense – A fearful or tense dog may have a closed mouth with the lips pulled back at the corners. He/she may also be panting rapidly. If the dog is panting and then suddenly closes his mouth, this may be a sign of increased stress.
- Physical warnings – A dog that is reaching his/her breaking point, will often wrinkle his muzzle and pull his lips upward to display his front teeth. The forehead will be tense, and the eyes will be focused and hard.

Additional terms or facial expressions of note:

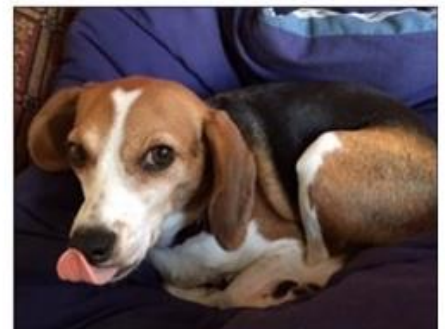
- “Long lip” (mouth closed and lips pulled back at the corners) – Indicates fear or tension
- Drooling in the absence of food – Sign of extreme fear or stress
- “Offensive pucker” (top of muzzle wrinkled and corner of the mouth short to form a “C shape” with the lips pulled up vertically to display the front teeth) – Warning sign of fear, anxiety, and possible aggression
- Submissive “grin” or “smile” – Seeing a dog's teeth does not always mean that he/she is aggressive. This highlights the importance of looking at the body language as a whole. When the teeth can be seen but the head is lowered, the tail is wagging, and the body posture is soft, this “smile” may not be a warning sign! A submissive grin is sometimes accompanied by squinting eyes.
- Yawning – Can be an early sign of stress
- Lip licking – Can be another early sign of stress
- Air snap – If the dog bites the air near you, this is a warning and he/she may mean business!



OPEN MOUTH
relaxed or play



CLOSED MOUTH
Tension which will also be seen in
the face



TONGUE FLICK, LIP LICK
A sign of stress



TIGHT MOUTH
Tense or nervous



SHOWING TEETH
Warning sign

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Understanding Dog Communication", k9ofmine.com

A dog's tail

Moving on to the other end of the dog, we can learn a lot about the dog from the position of the tail and how the tail is moving. Again, though, different dogs have very different tail shapes and positions, and we must consider this when interpreting body language. Still images do not tell us the full story here, as we really need to see the movement of the tail to best interpret the dog's state of mind.

- Tail position:
 - Relaxed: A relaxed dog will usually hold his tail in a neutral position at or just below the level of the spine.
 - Excited or aroused: As the dog becomes more excited or aroused, the tail usually rises above the level of the spine.
 - Fearful: A fearful dog may tuck his tail behind his rear legs, even holding it in a rigid position against the underside of the belly
- Tail movement:
 - Relaxed: A relaxed dog may wave the tail loosely from side to side or in a sweeping circular motion
 - Excited or aroused: The movements may become shorter/twitchier and more rapid as the dog becomes more aroused
 - Recent study showed dogs tend to wag more to the right when they feel positive about something and more to the left when faced with something negative
 - Helicopter tail wag: Tail spinning in a circle = Happy wag



HIGH TAIL, QUICK TIGHT WAG

Aroused



NEUTRAL TAIL, RELAXED WAG

Neutral height held straight at attention
is alert and attentive



LOW, TUCKED TAIL

Stress, fearfulness



NEUTRAL TAIL, STILL

Relaxed

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Body posture and additional findings

- “Raised hackles”: The fur can stand up across the dog’s shoulders, down the spine, and above the tail as a sign of excitement, stress, or even aggression
- Increased shedding can be seen when a dog is frightened or stressed
- Dog’s weight distribution
 - Cowering/hunched towards the ground – Sign of fear or stress, Trying to make himself look smaller and/or get away while indicating that he doesn’t want to harm you
 - Weight shifted forward – May indicate interest but may also be a sign of trying to appear larger and more intimidating
- Play bow – Used to initiate play with other dogs or even people
- Rolling over – This can have many meanings
 - Often trying to convey that “I am not a threat”
 - May be asking for a belly rub if the dog’s tail is gently wagging and the mouth is slightly open
 - If the tail is tucked and the lips are stiff, the dog may be scared
- Paw raise – Can indicate uncertainty or insecurity
- Stiff, slow movements – Indicate uncertainty, stress, and avoidance
 - Other avoidance behaviors include looking away, sniffing, scratching, and lying down
 - A dog that is extremely fearful may freeze completely



PLAY BOW
Happy and playful



SHIFTING BACK
Avoidance



RAISED HACKLES
Aroused

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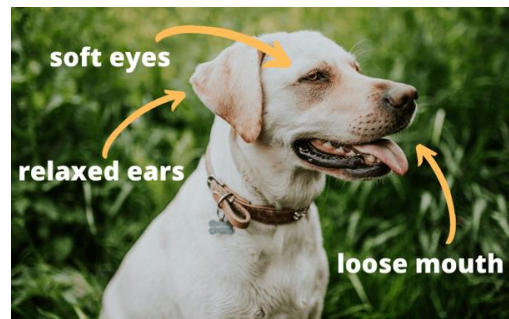
DOG BODY LANGUAGE IN SOCIAL SITUATIONS:

When to consider removing a dog from a dog-on-dog encounter or play session

Behaviors of a relaxed dog

Dogs displaying these behaviors are most likely to be comfortable, relaxed, and engaged in healthy interaction with others:

- Neutral ears positioned slightly outward
- Soft gaze
- Squinty eyes, Almond-shaped with little white showing
- Loose, open mouth without tension
- Mid-position or low tail
- Loose tail wags
- If playful, the following may be seen as well
 - Play bow
 - Loose, bouncy, and wiggly movements
 - Helicopter or circular tail movements
 - When dogs are playing well together, additional play signals include the following:
 - Taking turns (switching who is on the top and who is on the bottom)
 - Self-handicapping (dogs may let themselves “lose” to be fair)
 - Taking breaks (lots of play punctuated by brief pauses)



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Behaviors of a tense or nervous dog

Dogs displaying these “calming” or “displacement” behaviors may be getting a little nervous and are probably trying to diffuse or prevent an escalation of tension. Watch carefully and be ready to remove a dog who is:

- Licking lips
- Yawning
- Stretching
- Shaking (done to release pent up excitement or nervousness)
- Sniffing the ground
- Scratching
- Sighing
- Panting without being overheated (usually with a retracted tongue and rapid breathing)



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Behaviors of a fearful dog

Carefully monitor and be ready to remove a dog from a social situation when you see any of these behaviors:

- Whale eyes
- Averting gaze
- Dilated pupils, which can make the eyes appear “glassy”
- Tucked tail
- Body shifted backward OR dog leaning away
- Flattened ears
- Tight mouth
- Tense face
- Rolling over
- Urinating
- Leg lifted
- Raised hackles
- Pacing
- Extreme drooling
- Shivering
- Dandruff or excessive shedding



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Dogs on high alert

Consider immediately removing a dog showing one or more of these signs from the situation:

- Whale eyes
- Dilated pupils, Can make the eyes appear “glassy”
- High, forward ears
- Flattened ears
- Closed mouth
- Tense face
- High tail, may be moving rapidly
- Forward body posture
- Forward stance



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Dog displaying serious warning signs

Give this dog space! **Remove a dog displaying one or more of these behaviors immediately from the situation:**

- Showing teeth
- Puckered mouth, wrinkles over the nose
- Growling or snarling
- Frozen position
- Head and body aligned towards you
- Staring with hard eyes
- Whale eyed
- Tense body
- May be lunging, biting, or air snapping

Dog handling: Important things to keep in mind

Comforting dogs with space

Although it can be tempting and we may do it with our dogs at home, avoid hugging or kissing shelter dogs. Humans may find a hug comforting, but most dogs do not like to be comforted with hugs and kisses. This is especially true with our shelter dogs who may have been recently traumatized and are feeling less than trustful of humans. Sometimes the best thing you can do for a dog is to give him/her some space.

Aggressive body language

A dog with aggressive behaviors who is not acting on this emotion is letting you know that he can become aggressive if the need presents itself. Again, the best thing you can do is give the dog the space that he needs to regain a level of comfort.

Defusing a stressful situation

A stressed or fearful dog usually starts with warning signals such as tensing up, staring, showing teeth, and growling. If these warning are ignored, he may progress to biting. When aggression occurs, safety for the volunteer and the dog always comes first. Ideally we want to avoid these situations by interpreting earlier signs of discomfort. If truly aggressive behavior occurs, though, please try to keep the following things in mind:

- Stop what you were doing when the aggression occurred. For example, if you were petting the dog and he reacted, stop petting the dog.
- Redirect or distract the dog with a toy or treat
- If a dog won't release a toy, do not try to pull it from his mouth – Try to trade it for another toy or a treat

Dog on dog aggression

If a dog-to-dog fight occurs, the following should be attempted to keep yourself and the dogs safe

- DO NOT try to physically separate the dogs.
- DO NOT grab for collars.
- Never put yourself between the dogs.
- If you have control of the leash, hold it and call for help.
- You may try to stop the fight by
 - Loud noises, yelling, banging bowls, using the air horns
 - Throw a blanket over the dog's head to disorient
 - Use of water

Dog on human aggression

Aggression + Aggression = More aggression

If a dog is acting aggressively towards a person, please keep the following in mind:

- Move slowly and calmly away from the dog in a sideways fashion
 - Do not turn your back towards the dog

- Move sideways to slowly remove yourself from the situation.
 - Do not run from the dog, as this can trigger a chase
- Do not stare directly into the dog's eyes
 - Avert your gaze
- Do not escalate the situation with confrontational methods such as yelling or physical correction
- If you cannot move away from the dog, "be a tree"
 - Cross your arms slowly and stand with legs together
- Distract the dog
 - Take a fistful of treats and slowly toss them away from you
 - "Feed" the dog the leash, your clothing, or a toy
- Call for help
- If the dog is on a leash, try to run the leash through something like a tree or a fence so you can step away entirely
 - If this is not possible, keep your arms rigid and hold the dog as far away from you as you can
 - Keep the leash short enough so the dog cannot reach your legs or hands

The Do's and Don'ts of Handling

OBSERVE: Always start with observing the dog within the cage. If there is any concerning behaviors that you are not trained or comfortable to work with, do not take that dog out.

GET ACQUAINTED: Let the dog get used to your presence, smell, voice, and give the dog a treat. Once the dog appears more calm than aroused, you may begin the process of taking the dog out.

NO PUNISHMENT: STAF's volunteers use positive reinforcement only. At no time are you to strike an animal. Never correct a dog by jerking the leash. Always apply gradual pressure to redirect a dog while on a walk.

NEVER CORNER A DOG: Never corner a dog at any time for any reason. If a dog will not approach the front of the kennel for its walk, it does not want to go with you. Try again later.

KEEP YOUR BALANCE: Always keep your balance while with the dog. With feral cats and wildlife in the area, you never know when a dog with prey drive may spot an animal to chase.

KENNELS: Never enter into an adult dog's kennel except to leash the dog, return him to the kennel, etc. The only exception to entering a kennel is for litters of puppies under 6 months of age. This is the dog's space, respect its space.

GREETING A NEW DOG

Good overall rules to let the dog know that you are not a threat

- No touching, No talking, No eye contact
- Maintain a calm energy
- Go slowly and be patient

Additional steps for success

- Approach from an angle, turn to the side, and squat
 - Turn your body sideways so that you're not facing the dog head-on
 - Bend at the knees to get down to the dog's level
- Never lean over the dog
 - Looming may be intimidating to a fearful dog
- Maintain a relaxed body posture
 - Dogs can read your body language.
- Do not smile at the dog
 - Smiling may show your teeth, which can be a threatening sign
- Do not stare the dog in the face
 - Keep a soft gentle gaze to the side of the dog
- Allow the dog to make the initial approach.
- Hold your hands loosely at your sides, palm backwards, allowing the dog to approach on his own if he wishes to may smell you
 - An open hand may be more threatening to the dog
 - Avoid extending your hand to a nervous or unfamiliar dog
 - Allow the dog to close the gap
- If the dog approaches you on his own and seems comfortable with touch, reach under his/her chin instead of over his/her head
 - Pat him/her on the chest
 - Allow dog to see your hand throughout this meeting
- When you speak to the dog, use a quiet, monotone, low, friendly voice
- Do not take away a dog's food or other high value items (toys, raw hides, treats).

DOG WALKING 101

Once you have been a regular volunteer at STAF for 3 months, you may be eligible to walk dogs off site.

WHY WE WALK our dogs at STAF

Dogs who are going out with volunteers are going out for quality time beyond good toiletry habits. Walking shelter dogs has multiple benefits:

- Good for the mental health of the dog (lots of new sights, smells, sounds, and textures)
- Exercises the dog for health and weight control
- Socializing with continuous positive experiences with new people
- Time to work on basic dog skills like loose leash walking helps pet retention after adoption
- Walking a dog lets out pent up energy from being kenneled at night.

The following rules must be followed to ensure the safety of the dog, yourself, and the public:

- Never force a dog to go on a walk
 - Never pull a dog or force them to do something they don't want to do. Use treats and praise. If they don't want to walk, you may want to find a quiet place and simply stroke them or brush them.
- Use a harness
 - Must know how to correctly fit the harness
- Always use two leashes, One attached to the harness and one to the dog's collar
 - The leash keeps your dog safe, preventing your dog from running away from you and into traffic, chasing other dogs and small animals, and jumping on people.
- Keep the dog on a short leash, especially while still in the building
 - Use a 4-6 foot leash, Keep shortened even further while still in the building
 - Do not use retractable leashes
- Open each door with the dog **behind you**
- Call "Dog coming!" several times at each door entrance
- Make sure no one approaches you when you are on a walk
 - Do not allow the dog to interact with people on the walk. Politely thank the person for their interest and instruct them to ask for the dog at the front desk to begin a meet and greet with a staff person.
- Be aware of traffic, people, and other dogs
- Do not allow the dog to interact with other dogs on the walk
 - Whether it is another shelter dog or the general public with a pet, the dog should not meet other dogs on the walk.
- Refrain from using your phone to text, call, or listen to music --- Focus your attention on the dog and your surroundings at all times!
 - Do bring your cellphone in case of an emergency and program the phone number of the front desk of your shelter location into the phone.
- Watch the dog for signs of fatigue, over heating or becoming too cold.
- A good walk should last between 20 minutes and 1 hour (in general)

Good leash technique:

- Hold the leash in a way that reduces risk of injury.
 - Palm method



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- Do NOT wrap the leash around your hands or fingers



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- When gathering the leash, gather it accordion style.



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- Keep both hands on the leash. If you walk your dog on your left side, your left hand manages the length of the leash. The right hand securely holds the leash loop, preventing accidental dropping of the leash.



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[https://www.maddiesfund.org/assets/
documents/Institute/Dog%20Handlin
g%20Handbook.pdf](https://www.maddiesfund.org/assets/documents/Institute/Dog%20Handling%20Handbook.pdf)

- When taking your dog out for a walk, keep them on a loose leash - meaning the leash has a slack in a "J" or a "U" shape instead of being tight.
- You may need to shorten the leash when walking by people and other dogs to prevent your dog from jumping up or being approached uninvited.

TRICK TRAINING FOR FUN AND RELAXATION

Add stimulating fun and mental enrichment, build trust and confidence, and add marketable skills to any dog's resume by teaching a few basic commands and tricks. There are so many benefits for STAF dogs!

This section is designed to be a brief introduction for STAF volunteers interested in working on a trick or two with appropriate STAF dogs. *Please check with your Shift Leader before proceeding with trick training.*

To keep our dogs comfortable and happy, we ask that you keep training sessions **light and low-key**, using a **soft and upbeat voice** for praise and commands. **Please keep the sessions short** (5-10 minutes) and **reward the dog profusely** – especially in the initial phases – with treats and praise. Start with high value, tasty treats that your subject dog loves and will respond to. You can slowly reduce the quantity and value of treats as the trick is mastered.

One other thing to keep in mind: Often the best method is to simply “lure” the dog into performing the behavior you’re looking for on their own, waiting for the light bulb to go on when they realize that the behavior gets them treats and praise. This positive approach is much less stressful and more successful than any kind of physical manipulation such as pushing on the dog’s hindquarters to get them to sit. In general, you want to use treats and praise to draw the dog into the behavior you’re looking for and then reward the heck out of it. No need for a “No” if they’re not getting it...just focus on rewarding the tries. Be patient and keep it light and fun.

Be sure and note your trainee’s new tricks and progress on his/her kennel notes so other volunteers can build on their progress.



TOUCH

A training basic for any dog, Touch is a very useful and easily-taught “trick” to get your dog’s attention and get them to mentally come back to you when distractions abound. All you’re looking for here is the dog to boop your hand with his nose, which can be enough to “break the spell” where you want to focus his attention on you. Start by holding your flattened palm, fingers pointing down, about 6” from our dog’s nose. Be careful not to startle the dog by thrusting your hand at them too forcefully. You may find that the dog touches his nose to your hand all by himself. If so, treat, praise, and withdraw your hand. Even a “point” toward your hand with the nose is a start. If you’re not getting any response, withdraw your hand for a moment and try again. *HINT: Try rubbing some yummy treat on your hand to jump-start the process.* When you’re getting consistent nose boops, you can add the word “Touch” when you present your hand and start backing off on the treats.



SIT

Using tiny bits of a high value treat, lure your dog from a standing position into a Sit by drawing the treat up and over his head about 6" away. Most dogs will readily follow the treat with their nose until they naturally sit. Reward with treat and profuse praise! After a few successful "lures", add the command "Sit" and start to back off the lure by simply holding the treat near the dog's head and saying "Sit", followed by a treat and more praise, of course. With consistency, it won't be long before the dog sits with just the command.

DOWN

Most dogs can be lured into a Down position from either a sitting or standing position. Start by luring your dog's nose downward by drawing the treat in a straight line towards the ground, again about 6" away from him. Reward your dog's attempts, even if they don't quite lie all the way down (butts in the air are fine for now). Again, gently add the command "Down" after attempts get more successful.



STAY

As mastery of the Sit and Down increases, the command to Stay can be added, although Stay can also apply to a standing dog. From any of these positions, make eye contact with your dog and gently say "Stay" while holding your non-treat hand up, palm forward. If the dog waits even a second or two, reward that! As soon as the dog is holding the Stay for a little bit longer, add the release word "Okay" and drop your hand to your side. Reward with treat and praise when the dog approaches after release.



SIT PRETTY

Sit Pretty teaches balance, trust, and attention while also strengthening a dog's back and core muscles. From a Sit, lure your dog by drawing a high value treat straight upward from his nose until his front paws start to leave the ground. Treat and praise any attempt! If dog sits back down, stands up on his back legs, etc., just lure him back into a Sit and try again. Be aware that this takes a fair amount of strength and balance. Don't ask the dog to hold the position for too long at first. If the dog is unable to balance right away, you can provide some support with your hand or forearm.

When the dog starts to Sit Pretty just by having the treat held over his head from a Sit, it's time to start reducing treats and introducing the verbal command and/or a hand signal. From there, you can build to a longer duration gradually.



PAW and HIGH FIVE

These are two more great exercises that help dogs trust and bond with people. From a Sit, gently touch the dog's front leg with your non-treat hand, holding your treat hand slightly away. Don't allow him to take the treat yet...you're waiting for him to lift that paw even a little bit. When he does, treat and reward! Most dogs catch on to this pretty quickly. He may even "cover" your hand with his paw. As the light bulb comes on, turn your hand palm up and add the gentle command "Paw" when he places his paw in your

hand. Excellent!

Adding HIGH FIVE is easy – just open your "paw" hand flat and start to raise it up. Chances are he'll soon follow suit and reward you with a High Five.

A potential drawback: Some dogs won't know when to stop with tricks like Paw and High Five. Be careful to praise/reward those overeager types only for those tricks that are asked for.





NOSE IN THE HOLE

This is another trust-building trick that can also be a handy way of distracting a dog from something scary like a nail trimming or vet exam. The goal is to get the dog to willingly place his nose in a “hole” you make with your hand, and later to keep it there. Start by making a “C” shape with your non-treat hand and holding it 6”-10” in front of the yummy treat you’re holding with your other hand. Wait till he starts to reach for the treat *through* the hole, rather than trying to go around it, and treat/praise the effort. You may only get a brief second of your dog actually placing his nose in your hand at first. As he relaxes and gets the idea, wait for just a beat longer before rewarding, working up to a longer

period of “nose time”.

Keep your hand loose – the idea isn’t to grasp the dog’s nose, rather to encourage them to rest it in your hand. Go slow and watch for signs of fear or anxiety. If you have a helper to dole out treats, you can use both hands to form a larger circle which may be easier for some dogs.

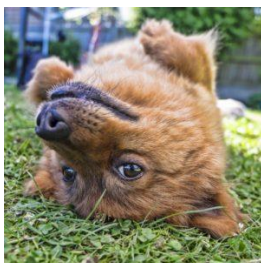
ROLL OVER

For active, agile dogs without back problems, Rollover is a fun and easy crowd-pleaser that builds confidence and encourages trust and bonding. As always, though, watch for signs of pain, fear, or anxiety and don’t push for success too soon.



Starting from a Down position, gently lure the dog to get into the pre-rollover position (hips shifted to one side). Do this by luring his nose in an arc over the middle of his back. *Resist the urge to push his body physically – just lure.* When the dog follows the lure, treat and praise.

Gradually draw the lure farther to the other side of the dog’s body, luring them from a Down to lying on one side. This is the first big step...treat and praise!



From there, gradually increase the “roll” by drawing the lure further toward the dog’s opposite side and finally...all the way over! Dogs who do a Rollover for the first time can be quite pleased with themselves and seem to revel in their accomplishment. Show them how pleased you are too!

RESOURCES

ASPCA

[7 Tips on Canine Body Language | ASPCApro](#)

AKC

[Understanding Dog Body Language: Decipher Dogs' Signs & Signals \(akc.org\)](#)

Best friends

[Dog Body Language Interpretation | Best Friends Animal Society](#)

Fear Free Shelter Program

<https://fearfreeshelters.com/program/>

Shelter Playgroup Alliance

<https://www.shelterdogplay.org/workshops>

K9 of mine

[Dog Body Language 101: Understanding Dog Communication \(k9ofmine.com\)](#)

Canine coaching

[Canine Body Language - The Eyes - Canine Coaching](#)

St. Hubert's Animal Welfare Center

<https://www.maddiesfund.org/assets/documents/Institute/Dog%20Handling%20Handbook.pdf>