

# **HANDLING DOGS AT PUBLIC EVENTS**

**A guide for new  
handlers**



# GOALS

**This presentation is intended to help you:**

- **Learn how to safely and confidently handle shelter dogs**
- **Recognize dog body language and respond appropriately**
- **Know how to interact with the public and other dogs**
- **Create a positive, stress-free experience for dogs and people**



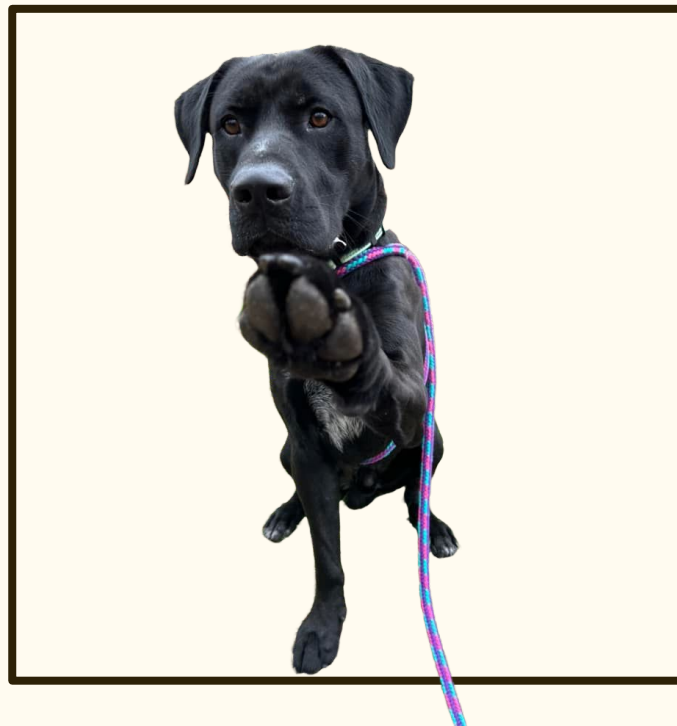
# THE SHELTER DOG FACTOR

- Shelter dogs may have unknown history or trauma
- Behavior can shift under stress (like noise, crowds, heat)
- Patience, observation, and calm energy go a long way



# Know Your Dog:

- Ask staff about known behaviors, fears, and preferences
- What motivates the dog? (treats, praise, toys)
- Is the dog dog-friendly? People-friendly? Kid-safe?
- Always double-check collar fit and leash attachment



# Greeting A Dog

- Let the dog approach *you*
- Turn sideways, avoid direct eye contact, only crouch if safe
- If safe, before petting, offer your hand slowly, fingers curled in
- Watch for signs of stress or engagement before touching

## HOW TO GREET A DOG



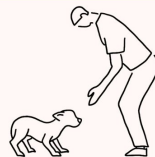
- No eye contact

- Let the dog approach when he wants

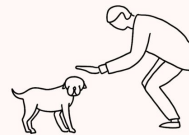
- Keep side or back non-threatening position



- Pet him on the side of his body or face
- Stroke him on his back



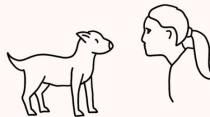
Lean over, stick your hand in his face



Lean over, stick your hand on top of head



Grab or hug him



Stare him in the eye



Squeal/shout in his face



Grab his head and kiss it

pupford

# BODY LANGUAGE TO KNOW

- **Happy or Relaxed:** Soft eyes, loose body, wagging tail at mid-height or loose non-tucked tail
- **Stressed or Overstimulated** - Yawning, lip licking, panting, wide eyes, tucked tail, pacing, whining
- **Aggressive/Fearful** - Growling, stiff body, direct stare, lunging, tail is up and stiff

## A happy dog

A dog who is happy will be relaxed.

1

Dog has a relaxed body posture, smooth hair, mouth open and relaxed, ears in natural position, wagging tail, eyes normal shape.



2

Dog is inviting play with bottom raised, smooth hair, high wagging tail, eyes normal shape, ears in natural position, may be barking excitedly.



3

Dog's weight is distributed across all four paws, smooth hair, tail wagging, face is interested and alert, relaxed and mouth open.



## A worried dog

These dogs are telling you that they are uncomfortable and don't want you to go near them.

1

Dog is standing but body posture and head position is low. Tail is tucked under, ears are back and dog is yawning.



2

Dog is lying down and avoiding eye contact or turning head away from you and lip licking and ears are back.



3

Dog is sitting with head lowered, ears are back, tail tucked away, not making eye contact, yawning, raising a front paw.



## An angry or very unhappy dog

These dogs are not happy and want you to stay away or go away.

1

Dog is standing with a stiffened body posture, weight forward, ears are up, hair raised, eyes looking at you – pupils dark and enlarged, tail is up and stiff, wrinkled nose.



2

Dog is lying down cowering, ears flat, teeth showing, tail down between legs.



3

Dog is standing with body down and weight towards the back, head is tilted upwards, mouth tight, lips drawn back, teeth exposed, eyes staring, ears back and down, snarling.



# WHAT TO DO

- **If relaxed or happy:** Continue calm interaction
- **If stressed or overstimulated:** Give space, try treats, walk to a quieter place
- **If aggressive/fearful:** Stay calm, don't correct harshly, remove from the situation ASAP.





# Managing Interactions

- Be your dog's advocate
- Don't allow anyone to rush up to or touch the dog without asking
- Teach others: "Let's ask the dog if they're ready to say hi"
- Say "No, thanks" if the dog is overwhelmed—it's okay to decline





# Small Kids and Dogs

- Never let kids approach without adult permission
- Coach kids: walk slow, don't hug or lean
- Show how to offer a treat (if the dog is comfortable) with a low flat hand
- Let the dog walk away if they choose
- Consider using a "Do Not Pet" vest or bandana for shy dogs



# DOG ON DOG ENCOUNTERS

- Maintain a safe buffer zone—Step further away if necessary
- Keep leashes short but loose (no tension)
- Do NOT let dogs greet face-to-face unless cleared by staff
- Signs of tension? Turn and walk away calmly



# HELPING DOGS FEEL SAFE

- Keep a calm, confident energy
- Talk to the dog—your voice matters
- Use treats for positive associations
- Give breaks from crowds if possible
- Find shade and water frequently



# Gear Check & Tips

- Check collar/harness fit before every outing
- Keep leash secure around wrist or waist
- Have poop bags, treats, and water
- Watch for overheating (excessive panting, drooling)





# Be a Good Community Member

- Clean up after the dog (always!)
- Be courteous to other handlers and the public
- Help your dog make a good impression for adoption
- Share positive stories and educate gently



# WHEN IN DOUBT, ASK FOR HELP

- Never force a dog into a situation
- Ask a staff member or experienced volunteer if unsure
- Your role is to support the dog's emotional well-being





# FINAL REMINDERS

- Every dog is different—go at their pace
- Safety first—for people and pups
- You're making a huge difference for these dogs—thank you!





**QUESTIONS?**



**THANK  
YOU!**