

DOG ADOPTION / FOSTER RESOURCES PACKET



CONTENTS

Position Statement: Positive Reinforcement
Stimulus Detox / Decompression
Training & Behavior: The Basics
Tips About Training & Behavior
Dog Bite Prevention
Dogs and Minors
Crate Use & Separation Anxiety
Potty Skills
Resource-Guarding
Mouthing (puppy & adult)
Jumping / Humping / Arousal
Leash Skills

Reactivity
Enrichment
Socialization
Equipment

Important Links:
Dog Licensing
Dog Body Language
Lost Dogs – First Steps
Identifying Separation Anxiety
Poison Control
MSPCA Clinic



POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

Position Statement on Training & Behavior

As a welfare organization, Thomas J. O'Connor promotes the use of modern training, behavior, handling, and treatment methodologies, based on evidence, that prioritize animal welfare and avoid pain, discomfort, and fear. Aversive training and handling practices are viewed as a threat to animal welfare, and can be dangerous to animals and humans, and the animal-human bond.

What many don't know is that the pet industry is unregulated. This means that anyone, whether or not they have science supported credentials that require ongoing learning in addition to vetting and oversight, can hang a sign and offer training services. This puts communities at a disadvantage when it comes to choosing a qualified trainer or behavior consultant. Using the internet to search for a qualified professional, or accurate information, can generate leads that are ultimately harmful to our pets.

Because we mirror governing bodies who have put forth guidelines for ethical practices, we strongly encourage adopters, and require fosters to avoid harsh methods for interacting with pets, including the use of shock (even on a beep setting), prong collars, choke, spray bottles, startle devices, yelling, shoving, and the use of coercion. These methods may suppress behavior and 'stop' something in the moment, but it doesn't look at the underlying emotions or reason for the behavior. Stopping something in the moment doesn't create lasting learning or pleasant emotions, and create fallout such as increased anxiety and aggression. Once we understand the underlying reason for a challenging behavior, we can teach our pets alternative behaviors and improve coping strategies. Most behaviors we find annoying are normal, so we can develop understanding and make changes via learning theory instead of using punishment and suppression.

If you need additional assistance with behavior challenges, call 413-781-1484 xt. 6

To learn more about the science-supported practices/guiding principles set forth by reputable, governing bodies, please visit the following websites where you'll find position statements and related research:

PPG (Pet Professional Guild)

www.petprofessionalguild.com/about-us/position-statements/

ACVB (American College of Vet Behaviorists)

www.dacvb.org/page/PositionStatement

AVSAB (American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior)

www.avsab.org/resources/position-statements/

The Academy for Dog Trainers

www.academyfordogtrainers.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Methods-Position-Statement.pdf



STIMULUS DETOX & DECOMPRESSION

New Adoptions / New Fosters

When bringing a new adoption or foster home, it's tempting to want to share the new arrival with friends, family, and sometimes other pets. However, one of the most important things we can do when we put an animal in a brand-new environment, is to provide plenty of time to **fully decompress**, and **limit exposure** to new things while gradually introducing our new friend to the house, the yard, and very slowly to other members of the home.

Decompression takes longer than a few days or a week, it can take as long as 6 months to a year or longer depending on the individual, which is normal. We often hear owners describing dogs as 'perfect' and 'mellow' in the first few weeks, but this is usually because the pup has not fully decompressed and is not offering a lot of behaviors. It's important to be prepared for changes as the dog becomes more relaxed and confident. Below are steps to take to help your new family member feel comfortable and set everyone up for success.

1. Keep their world small for the first several weeks – a stimulus detox, no guests (any species), no walks into town or around the neighborhood, just in the yard. Allow your new adoption to explore at his or her pace, and very gradually provide access to larger areas of the house/apartment.
2. Use barriers/gates! This allows your new friend, and resident animals, to safely sniff and check each other out while avoiding conflict. The timing can vary depending on the animal, but several days to a week or more are timelines to consider.
3. When they've become familiar and comfortable enough with each other through barriers, and you're ready to do an intro, make sure to leave the leash on in case you need to grab it quickly. Try a few parallel walks with dogs so they aren't face-to-face with each other (which dogs find threatening), and allow them to check each other out while walking. As always, don't punish (yell, scold, jerk leash etc.) simply remove and separate without a fuss. Keep interactions happy.

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4. Keep these initial interactions **brief, happy**, and end on a **good note!**
5. Pick up toys, treats, and food so there aren't any items in play that may cause a resource-guarding incident.
6. Feed furry family members separately to avoid anxiety during mealtime. This is a safe practice no matter how well resident pets get along, even a tiny bit of worry about another animal approaching while eating can be a starting point for resource-guarding.
7. Don't leave a new adoption alone to roam freely with resident pets. Even if you don't have other pets in the home, take the time to get to know your new adoption/foster before leaving alone and unsupervised. For some dogs, this may not be an option. *Please review the crate training section or handout.*
8. Because your new companion is stressed and needs time to decompress, please avoid 'husbandry' activities until you and your friend have more of a bond. Activities such as bathing, nail clipping, grooming, dental care, and other forms of handling, should wait until your new friend has an established foundation of trust with you, and a solid routine. Rushing these activities can make a dog feel trapped and thus may trigger a bite. When you're ready to introduce more handling, be sure to use counterconditioning (pair with high value treats and take things slowly – see the Tips About Training & Behavior section).
9. Dogs are flight risks during decompression. Be sure windows and doors are not easily accessible to your nervous new adoption/foster, use baby gates or other barriers, and keep the leash on even in a fenced area. If your dog becomes lost, please visit **Lost Dogs - What to Do** www.tjoconnoradoptioncenter.com/resources/lost-dogs-what-to-do on the TJO website for crucial first steps, and report to TJO immediately: 413-781-1484 xt. 1



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....The Basics....

TRAINING & BEHAVIOR

Dogs learn in so many ways, every day, whether we're aware of the learning or not. There are two very basic means of learning: learning by association (classical/respondent learning) and learning by consequence (operant learning). High value treats can be used for each type of learning, it's not always a reinforcement or 'reward' (remember rewards are not bribes!) For a deeper look at counterconditioning, commonly used to help dogs improve their emotional response to triggers, visit the Care for Reactive Dogs website: <https://careforreactivedogs.com>). If you need additional assistance, please reach out at the number below.

Dogs are strongly motivated by the need for safety. To help dogs feel safe we can provide a reliable and predictable routine for meals, rest, potty breaks, exercise, and enrichment. When we begin teaching new skills, it's important to observe a dog's body language to be sure they are comfortable during the brief sessions. When dogs don't feel safe, they express it in a variety of ways: shutting down (which can appear 'calm'), avoiding people/animals, places, activities, or things that seem threatening or unsafe, barking, lunging, growling, potentially biting if they feel trapped, cowering, hiding, or vocalizing. Sometimes teaching new skills stalls because a dog is uncomfortable, nervous, or experiencing pain. Dogs are sometimes mislabeled as 'dramatic' or 'stubborn' when they are trying to communicate how they're feeling. Instead of brushing off behavior with a label, extend some understanding and remain open-minded about the possibility your dog is asking for help. Appreciating our dogs' communication is a big step towards building a bond and meeting our dogs' needs.

Another way to help your dog feel safe, is to avoid trigger-stacking. Trigger stacking is when a dog has a number of unpleasant, scary, or aversive experiences in succession, or throughout a day. Sometimes we push dogs too hard by bringing them to loud, chaotic places and events, insisting they spend time with other dogs or people, or fail to provide a quiet place when they need to retreat. Once trigger-stacked and over threshold a bite is more likely. Following exposure to stress, dogs really benefit from a day or two of down-time without day trips or high activity. All dogs have a limit/threshold, and that can change at intervals in their lives.

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TIPS ABOUT TRAINING & BEHAVIOR

Teaching dogs to live in a human-centric world is the best way to help dogs and humans live peacefully and safely together while building a bond. Learning should always be fun - keep sessions short, and end on a good note. Keep an eye on body language for signs of stress.

1. If you're attempting to teach a new skill, such as eliminating outside, and you're not having any success, consider whether or not your dog has a medical issue such as a urinary tract infection, or a source of pain that hasn't been identified. Pain cannot be trained away, so if there's a change in behavior, if training has stalled, or if you have an older dog who may start to feel stiff or arthritic, please consider consulting with a vet before continuing with any training plan.

2. An extension of #1, if we fail to recognize what a dog is experiencing, such as pain, fear, or frustration, it's easy to refer to the dog as 'stubborn.' Not only is this unnecessarily blaming of the dog, it fails to explore the many reasons a dog may not be able to focus or understand our requests. Pause for a moment, and explore the various stressors that might be interfering with your dog's interest in an activity or learning.

4. Sometimes teaching new skills can be challenging. Remember, teaching skills slowly and humanely is *one* aspect of living with another species. Please be sure to meet your dogs' needs fully by providing safe outlets for species-appropriate behaviors (*please see the **Enrichment** section*). When needs are unmet it can create frustration for your friend that may conflict with learning. Enrichment activities are not a luxury or 'extra,' enrichment is a crucial part of having pets in our lives.

5. **Management** and teaching new skills go hand in hand. Management means setting up the environment to aid in the learning process. In other words, to help a dog learn alternatives to counter-surfing, be sure not to leave food out in accessible areas, and limit access to the kitchen. Using these forms of management help prevent your dog from practicing counter surfing.

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6. The term '**separation anxiety**' is often used to describe a dog who becomes worried when left alone. Diagnosable separation anxiety is a behavioral disorder, 'a pathological stress or panic response triggered exclusively by the actual or perceived absence of a primary attachment figure.' *Source: PetMD*. Many dogs struggle, but for the average dog there are ways to improve the emotions associated with alone time. If a dog is completely unable to relax when alone, becomes destructive or self-injures, please reach out at the number below for additional assistance.

7. **ALWAYS & NEVER:** When we see consistent behaviors, we have a tendency to believe they are fixed behaviors that won't change. Whether it's a behavior we like or not, sentient beings evolve daily and behavior can change at any time as a result of new learning, a change in health, or a traumatic experience. For example, if your dog consistently comes when called, that doesn't mean your dog will *always* come when they hear their recall cue. If your dog has never bitten, or growled, or bolted through a door, it doesn't mean your dog will *never* do any of those things. Consistency isn't a guarantee of future behavior, so it's important to not only realize that we all have the potential to do something outside of our routine, we need to plan for it when it comes to our dogs. A hiccup in consistent behavior is an opportunity for us to learn about our companion.

8. It's so important for us to be able to accurately identify **canine body language** to gauge how things are going at any given time. Just as important is our own body language, which can impact how comfortable or anxious a dog is when we interact. Looming over a dog, using a stern voice, repeating cues a dog hasn't fully learned, and expressing our own frustration, can all inhibit learning, and instill anxiety instead of confidence in our learner. For images and descriptions of body language please visit the website:

www.tjoconnoradoptioncenter.com/resources/dog-resources

9. **Exercise & Rest:** every dog is an individual, and will need an appropriate amount of physical exercise and play to suit his/her needs and abilities. Brachycephalic dogs (those with smushed faces) are not appropriate for heavy exercise or hot weather. If you are considering a fun sport such as dock jumping, lure coursing, agility etc....please make sure you consult with your veterinarian to be sure your dog is physically able to build stamina and enjoy more intense forms of exercise. Monitor your dog's health and behavior regularly (new aggression can be a sign of pain). Dogs and puppies both need plenty of rest/sleep, puppies need more but make sure they have the ability to get that much needed rest! And don't forget to incorporate mental enrichment!

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DOG BITE PREVENTION

We often hear the expression, ‘my dog bit out of the blue!’ Dogs are very good at providing signals when they are uncomfortable, but those signals are often subtle and sometimes misunderstood or missed. When those early signals are missed, dogs will escalate their communication, including a growl and freeze, and eventually bite as they increasingly feel scared, trapped, or threatened. Once we learn how to recognize stress signals, and identify which methods of interacting cause dogs to feel uneasy, we can more safely spend quality time with our canine companions. Below are common types of interactions that are actually threatening to dogs, especially unfamiliar dogs, because they pierce a dog’s personal bubble. Instead of encroaching on a dog’s personal space, **allow the dog to approach and sniff without reaching out.** This allows the dog to learn more about you while feeling safe.



For more info: www.tjoconnoradoptioncenter.com/resources/dog-resources

If you need additional assistance with behavior challenges, call 413-781-1484 xt. 6

Once a dog is wiggly & relaxed and ready for interaction, we can check in with our friend to be sure each interaction is wanted (please don't hold a dog or a dog's leash to prevent the dog from moving away, or pick up a small dog without their consent). A **consent test** is petting a dog on the chest, back, or under the chin, (try to avoid the top of the head) for a brief time, and then pause to see what the dog does:

1. If the dog looks away, or walks away, the pup is saying, 'no thanks.'
2. If the pup nudges, paws, or leans in, that's a 'yes, more please.'
3. If a dog is conflicted, not leaving but not clearly saying 'yes,' assume it's a 'no.' When dogs are conflicted, they aren't feeling happy, so wait for the enthusiastic 'yes.'

Common signs of stress, (please visit website for images and more info):

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Whale eye (seeing whites of the eyes) | 6. Lifted paw |
| 2. Lip licking | 7. Tense/stiff body |
| 3. Yawning | 8. Hard eyes |
| 4. Head turning | 9. Furrowed brows |
| 5. Lowered head | 10. Closed/tense mouth |
| | 11. Piloerection (raised hackles) |

Misunderstood signals:

1. Exposed belly (NOT always a request for attention!) Look at the entire body before reaching for that belly! Look for stiffness vs wiggly and relaxed body posture, as well as assess what's happening in the environment for context. Visit the website for photos.
2. Tail wag (merely excitement, may also be agitated and not approachable.) Again, look at the entire body as well as what's happening in the environment.
3. Licking – is not kissing. Even if a dog initiates an interaction that includes licking your face, think of it as a peace-keeping gesture. Dogs do not hug and kiss to show affection and these can be very threatening and intrusive for dogs, although they do learn to tolerate it. Kissing and/or hugging a dog can lead to a bite.

*Don't punish the growl! When dogs learn their attempts at communication will be met with punishment/scolding, they will stop trying, and go right for the bite.

For detailed information and graphics, please visit the website: Dog Body Language and Bite Prevention: www.tjoconnoradoptioncenter.com/resources/dog-resources



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DOGS & MINORS *(Under 18)*

We love our family dogs, so much so we sometimes forget they are in fact dogs, another species with their own methods of communication, their own needs, and their own worries. Even the gentlest, most relaxed dogs will reach their limit if pushed. When we miss or ignore requests for space, or if they are expected to tolerate unwanted interactions they may bite when they don't have the means to end an interaction they find unpleasant. Children and dogs can live safely together and enjoy time together, but there are several ways to be sure the interactions are safe for everyone:

1. Teach children how to respectfully interact with dogs. Make sure children are not tugging on fur or body parts, sitting on or riding a dog, putting their face in *any* dog's face, or touching/picking up a dog when the dog is signaling 'no thanks.'
2. **Actively** supervise interactions between minors and dogs. Supervision can be 'active' or 'passive.' Passive supervision means being in the same room, but not actively watching and monitoring the interaction/s.
3. If you can't **actively** supervise children, use baby gates/barriers so you can focus on something else while everyone is safe.
4. Help children learn the importance of accurately reading body language, and help facilitate safe interactions by **modeling** respectful interactions.
5. Provide a safe space for your dog whenever there's additional chaos or activity, including social gatherings and playdates.
6. Respect space: if your dog is eating, sleeping/resting, give space. If your dog uses a crate, prevent intrusions - when a person crawls into an occupied crate, it traps the dog and increases the risk of a bite.
7. Avoid offering your infant so your dog can 'sniff' - babies can be particularly confusing to dogs (smells, movements) and this puts a baby at risk.
8. Learn more at the **Family Paws** website, full of resources and a practitioner search tool for families: www.familypaws.com

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CRATE USE *How & When* & SEPARATION ANXIETY

If you suspect your dog may be struggling with separation anxiety, avoid using a crate, as dogs with separation anxiety can also suffer from confinement phobia. Guardians are often tempted to place a dog in a crate to limit any destruction to the home, but placing an extremely anxious dog in a crate can make fear-based conditions much worse. If a dog is whining, pacing, barking, drooling, causing self-injury, or destroying items in the home or the home itself, it's time to **reach out for help** at the number below. Crates are not necessary for every dog, but teaching a dog to feel comfortable in a crate can be helpful when service people come and go, or if your pup needs a safe space away from people and activity. Below are steps for introducing dogs, who are **not** dealing with anxiety, to a crate:

1. Take things slowly. Your pup can be encouraged to explore a crate by tossing in high value treats (such as small chicken pieces), feeding meals, or tossing toys in the crate. Leave the door open during this phase so your pup can easily go in and come out.
2. Continue to create a happy association to the crate by providing comfy bedding and safe toys.
3. Start closing the door for very short periods of time. If your pup shows any signs of worry or distress, open the door, and try again later by tossing in high value treats and keep each session short.
4. Never use the crate as a means of punishing your dog. Punishment in general can create fallout for any dog, and this will prevent your pup from associating pleasant feelings with the crate, sabotaging success. The crate should always be a happy place.
5. Please don't use a crate for extended periods. Four hours maximum for adult dogs. For puppies, no longer than an hour for each month.

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POTTY SKILLS

One of the most frequent questions we receive about adoptable dogs, is whether or not they are potty trained. While some dogs do seem to exhibit signs of being potty trained during their time at the shelter, it's best to assume a dog is *not* potty trained, and start from the beginning. This helps keep expectations realistic, and meets the dog where he or she is. Transitions from one home to another are significant and it's a time of anxiety and confusion as they decompress and learn they are safe. – start fresh, establish a routine, and create a good association with the process of being leashed and going outside.

Once a dog appropriately eliminates outside, quickly offer a reinforcement such as high value treats (not kibble but pieces of chicken or other smelly treat) and lots of praise. Avoid scolding or becoming annoyed if there are accidents, accidents should be expected, adding fear or anxiety around potty habits can make it more difficult to establish a successful routine. Smaller dogs need to go outside more frequently, but it's important to remain consistent and select times such as first thing in the morning (whatever time that might be in your home), after meals, midday, evening, and prior to bedtime. Naps are usually followed by a need to potty. Puppies and young dogs need additional potty breaks as they're bodies develop.

Ever take your pup outside for a period of time, only to come inside and *then* your pup potties? Frustrating and confusing, but it either means learning isn't taking place as intended, or there's another issue. When changes in behavior occur, or if teaching a skill is a challenge, it may be time to consult with a qualified professional (positive reinforcement practitioner), or it may mean there's a medical issue interfering with learning. We can't train away a urinary tract infection, or any other medical issue including pain, so a vet visit may be necessary before your positive reinforcement training plan continues. Dogs change at various intervals in their lives. An older dog will experience changes as well, and it can sneak up on us. Please feel free to reach out if you're having difficulties.

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RESOURCE-GUARDING

Resource-guarding is a normal behavior that tells others, 'This is mine and I want to keep it.' Resource-guarding can occur around food, toys, beds, rooms, favorite spaces, people, or anything else that's a dog considers valuable. Resource-guarding is often mistaken for 'protection' when it involves a person, but instead of protecting a human, it's a desire to keep that human for themselves. Very often we view resource-guarding as rude, but if we think about our own mealtime, we would become quite annoyed if someone came along and tried to take a bite out of our sandwich or stuck their hand in our food. While it is normal for dogs to want to keep items to themselves, it can escalate quickly and become dangerous, especially when the body language is missed. The best way to manage and improve resource-guarding, is by understanding the root cause of the behavior and changing the dog's feelings about prized possessions. Setting up the environment, AKA 'management,' is also an important part of a behavior plan.

1. Resource-guarding is rooted in fear/anxiety about losing something deemed valuable. It's a survival instinct. Using confrontational methods such as arbitrarily removing an item, touching the item, and/or using any form of punishment, are all methods that lead to further anxiety and aggression.
2. Signs of resource guarding: growling, baring teeth, lunging, freezing, biting, whale eye, lip-licking, eating more quickly if someone approaches, stiffening and/or hovering over an item, positioning the body to block the approach of a person or other animal - 'body blocking,' taking an item and moving to another location, hiding items, are all signs a dog may be resource-guarding. (For examples of body language indicating discomfort or anxiety, please visit [Dog Body Language & Bite Prevention](#) page on our website).

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3. Trade up! When you need to remove something from or near your dog, use another item of equal or preferably higher value, and toss it to the side. Once the dog goes to retrieve the second item, pick up the original item with plenty of distance. This prevents the dog from feeling threatened or afraid of losing something while keeping everyone safe. This method also helps a dog learn that good things will frequently be available instead of removed. As you become viewed as a source of good things, your approach will become less worrying for your dog.
4. Once you've identified resource guarding, it's important to limit or prevent access to the item/s being guarded. Practice makes perfect for both desirable and undesirable behaviors, so if a dog continues to resource-guard something, the guarding will intensify and become more dangerous. For example, if a dog is guarding a couch, prevent access to the couch. Always feed animals separately to be sure everyone feels secure while eating, *even if the dogs typically get along*. If there's a toy bin, pick it up and provide access to toys separately. Use gates and separate areas to prevent conflict.
5. If there is lunging, growling, snapping, or if you feel **unsafe**, please call the shelter for immediate assistance at 413-781-1484 xt. 2.



MOUTHING, NIPPING, BITING

Mouthing, nipping, and biting aren't just done by puppies! Mouthing is communication and depending on context, can escalate and become dangerous. When biting has pressure, it can cause injury. If a dog is biting with pressure, or breaks skin, please call the shelter immediately. Playtime should not encourage the use of teeth on skin.

Puppies have a critical developmental period, between 3-16 weeks of age when they learn important information about their peers and the world, including bite inhibition. While we adopt out adults more often than puppies, it's helpful to know that some dogs may have missed out on some of this important learning. For other dogs, nipping may have been viewed as 'cute' in a previous home, which can mean an adult dog may not have learned that teeth and skin don't belong together.

When a dog is playing and begins using teeth on our hands or body, please do not yell, startle, scold, scare, or punish. Instead, show the pup that the fun ends when teeth touch skin - quietly stop everything and hide hands before it becomes painful or escalates. Dogs enjoy playing and interacting, so when we stop the interaction **consistently** as soon as teeth connect with skin, they can learn to adjust their play to keep the fun going. Consistency is important so they aren't getting mixed messages.

If playtime isn't too rowdy, it can be appropriate to offer a toy to take the place of your hand or arm (or other body part). Offering an appropriate outlet can also help teach a dog the safest way to play, but this won't be as effective if a dog has become too aroused. When dogs become overly aroused it's best to simply stop the interaction and take a pause. It's possible the game itself is too arousing for the pup. Every dog is different.

When to call a qualified professional? When these strategies don't work, and a dog becomes too excited and isn't able to take a break. When a dog practices any behavior, whether we like the behavior or not, it can become a default behavior through repetition. Please call the number below if you're struggling with mouthiness that escalates or doesn't respond to taking breaks during play.

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JUMPING, HUMPING, LEASH BITING, & AROUSAL

Jumping and humping both mean a dog's paws have left the ground, but as humans we would rather not have paw art on our clothing. **Jumping** can often be a request for connection and is normal in the dog world. **Humping**, which humans find embarrassing and confusing, is also normal and can be a coping strategy (for both male and female dogs) when a dog feels overwhelmed, worried, frustrated, or over-aroused. Both can be helped with consistency, without the use of harsh methods.

In order to help a pup learn that jumping isn't the best way to seek an interaction, we can angle our bodies and pause activity until all 4 paws are planted on the ground. Once that happens, we can resume the interaction and repeat as necessary. We don't need to use our voices, or use cues the dog may or may not understand (including 'no'), dogs can learn pretty quickly with consistency and will realize that the connection they're seeking slows down when paws land on us. If you can predict when a dog is about to jump, that's a good time to try scatter-feeding to help them learn that the ground is where good things can happen. It's also important **not** to use confrontational methods such as kneeling, shoving, restraining, or yelling. These types of responses can be ineffective, and dangerous with a dog who may be dealing with over-arousal.

Humping can mean a dog is not coping well with whatever is happening in the moment (guests, frustration/unmet needs, triggers, playtime that's getting too arousing), and can be a request for help. Angling the body and taking a pause might be effective, but when humping is the result of increasing emotions such as frustration or anxiety it can escalate quickly and feel unsafe. When dogs are really struggling, they may even grab the body with their paws in desperation. For the most part, humping can be helped by recognizing the triggers when it happens, and providing alternative outlets. If humping happens with any frequency, please reach out for assistance at the number below, and remember to avoid confrontational tactics.

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Leash biting can be a sign of overstimulation. Whenever a new skill is being taught, practice in a quiet, low-distraction environment to be sure the learning is fun. Offer a toy to provide an appropriate outlet. For dogs who have never worn a leash, start introducing the leash inside without attaching it, and pair it with high value goodies. Please do not 'pop' the leash as a 'correction,' instead of using punishment, make the learning fun and take things slowly as you build trust. If your dog is too aroused to learn, take a break and offer a quiet enrichment activity.

When a dog becomes over-aroused and jumps, mouths, nips, spins, and/or is unable to settle, the best thing to do is proactively identify triggers and set the environment up to avoid those triggers as much as possible. Provide your dog with a safe space when things become overwhelming. Common triggers are high activity/noises, a new environment and/or change in routine (thus common for new adoptions/fosters), and unmet needs. Dogs need sufficient sleep, appropriate exercise for the individual dog, social time with us, and mental enrichment. (*When food is part of mental enrichment in a multi-pet home, separate them to avoid conflict.)

If high arousal behaviors are occurring and feel dangerous or unmanageable, please call the number below for additional assistance.



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LOOSE-LEASH SKILLS

Most of us have been there – we imagine a nice stroll with our dog to take in the sights and get some exercise n’ fresh air, but our dog pulls hard, we do everything we can to keep up, and it’s not the leisurely stroll we imagined! When dogs pull, they have no idea we are struggling, they are so excited about all the informative smells, sights and sounds they just want to explore. Some dogs also deal with anxiety, and will rush along to hurry the process. Not only is this miscommunication frustrating for us, it can be dangerous to be dragged around. It’s important to remember this is not intentional, no dog deliberately pulls to be difficult, they are just following their senses and excited about the world, and we don’t want to change that enthusiasm (we do want to help nervous dogs). What’s the solution? *Teaching* dogs loose-leash walking! There’s no need to use painful equipment or yank on their sensitive necks. Teaching loose-leash walking starts inside where there are no distractions, and the skill is built slowly, with practice and lots of reinforcement (high value treats, praise, even a favorite toy). When dogs learn being near us is really beneficial, it can become a default behavior even with lots of distractions. **If you have a dog who is very afraid of the leash, head shy, or nervous about being touched and handled, please reach out at the number below for additional assistance.*

1. Start inside where it’s quiet – use a hallway, or a room where it’s easy to walk in a circle or around something. Choose a quiet time when there’s little traffic or activity.
2. Use high value treats in small pieces such as chicken, Vienna sausages, or other smelly food. Using high value treats is ideal for new skills, but the treats can be small pieces. Instead of skipping a meal entirely, reduce the full meal on learning days to avoid over-feeding.
3. Practice walking around the house (no leash/harness) and dropping small treats whenever your dog is near you to let your pup know being near you is great. This can be practiced in short spurts throughout the day.

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4. Slowly introduce the harness/leash – for some dogs this will take time, so don't rush. Present the leash/harness and treat, repeat. When the sight of the leash/harness isn't scary, progress just as slowly to touching the leash/harness against the shoulder until contact is comfortable.
5. When there's no fear during the harnessing/leashing process, practice inside first and reward frequently when the leash is slack. Stop walking when there's tension on the leash and begin again when the leash is loose. Keep sessions short, end on a good note.
6. Once you've practiced inside and have consistency, it's time to graduate to going outside in a small area to practice and play loose-leash games. This gradually increases distractions without being overwhelming.

There are a lot of games that can be used to help you and your dog develop loose leash walking skills while having fun and using positive reinforcement. Search for the title: **The ABSOLUTE BEST compilation of LOOSE LEASH WALKING TUTORIALS** by Kikopup.

If you're feeling frustrated, or struggling with this skill, please reach out at the number below for assistance.



REACTIVITY

According to the **Pet Professional Guild**, a *reactive dog* is one who “**overreacts in certain situations or to certain stimuli in their environment**.” This overreaction can vary in intensity, duration, or volume, and it is not the same as being inherently aggressive. (Source: *Pet Professional Guild*)

Reactivity is sort of like the crazy car alarm that makes everyone pause and look to see what all the commotion is about. The goal of a loud & crazy car alarm is to keep thieves *away*. The goal of reactivity, (lunging, barking), is to keep the trigger away. Each dog is different, but common triggers are other dogs or animals, people, cars passing, bicycles etc. Reactivity is an attempt to keep those scary things at a tolerable distance. Reactivity is not aggression; however, reactivity can escalate if the dog has no way to avoid the perceived threat. It's important to distinguish between an exaggerated reaction to something that isn't actually threatening vs. genuine threats. We never want to try and teach a dog to feel confident around real threats.

A great skill to practice inside, and then in the yard before an actual walk, is the -U-turn. When you're able to identify your dog's triggers, you can teach your dog 'let's go' so you can turn quickly and go in another direction, away from the trigger. Once you're too close to a trigger your dog will practice the reactive response. Getting your dog away from the perceived threat quickly means your dog won't be rehearsing this safety strategy.

As you learn what your dog's triggers are, you can then use counterconditioning, aka respondent conditioning, to help your dog create a pleasant association to those things that seem scary (and really aren't dangerous). When you see triggers at a distance that **doesn't** cause the lunging, barking, and reactive responses, allow your dog to see the trigger, and present high value treats while your dog is under threshold. Trigger-treats, trigger-treats, if the trigger goes away, the treats go away. This pairing means the trigger will eventually predict good things instead of fear. Please do not punish reactivity, which will make the anxiety and response worse. If you need additional assistance, please reach out at the number below.

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ENRICHMENT

As humans, we find ways to incorporate enrichment into our lives every day, whether it's reading a book, taking a walk, meeting a friend for coffee, checking out the paper, scrolling through Facebook, athletics, hobbies, travel, we are never at a loss for ways to keep our minds busy, staying physically fit, being social, and satisfying our curiosity when it comes to new things. Imagine how bored and frustrated we would become if we couldn't choose to do the things we enjoy! Enrichment for dogs sounds like an extra thing we can do for our dogs, but to really meet our dogs' needs we should be offering a variety of activities, both physical and mental, to satisfy their species-specific needs and offer choices. Enrichment can also improve problem solving skills and help build confidence, which can help reduce some destructive behaviors associated with boredom and frustration. Lastly, enrichment is an opportunity for us to learn about our dogs' preferences. It's fun to learn what makes them happy!

There are some things to know about enrichment to be sure it's fun, safe, and fulfilling:

1. Enrichment should not be frustrating. Start simple and offer hints to get your dog started. Some dogs prefer challenges, while others just want to keep busy without too much difficulty. Watch your dog's body language for signs of disinterest or frustration and make changes accordingly.
2. If it seems as though your dog has zero interest, it might be due to a lack of experience with novel activities, and we can help create enthusiasm with toys and activities, even with food.
3. Be sure to supervise your dog during enrichment activities. Some dogs will chew on enrichment puzzles or cardboard and tackle new items, while other dogs take things slowly and gently. Knowing your dog's style of play will help you choose the best activities.

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4. General rule about chews: if it drops and bounces, it's hard enough to break teeth (such as marrow bones and antlers). Short marrow bones can become lodged on the lower jaw which is not only scary, it can mean a vet visit and be an ordeal for the dog. It's also best to avoid rawhide as it can be loaded with chemicals, and create a blockage. There are a lot of options for healthy chews, but if you're not sure which to choose, please reach out at the number below for suggestions.
5. There are two main categories for enrichment. Is your dog a senior, or dealing with mobility or medical issues? Is your dog physically active? Does your pup become bored easily? The type of enrichment you incorporate should match your dog's needs, interests, and abilities. For more information and related articles:

ACTIVE	PASSIVE
Tactile Olfactory Cognitive Food-Based Social	Visual Auditory

Enrichment Resources:Facebook Groups:

'Canine Enrichment': www.facebook.com/groups/137561280156280/

'Canine Emotional Detox – Stress Release for Dogs':

www.facebook.com/groups/565426020225858

'Beyond the Bowl': www.facebook.com/groups/1747279312231501/about

Pet Professional Guild (article about high arousal and enrichment)

'Dogs Require Daily Enrichment:'

www.petprofessionalguild.com/barks/barks-magazine-blog/dogs-require-daily-enrichment/



SOCIALIZATION

What it is & what it isn't

When you hear the term 'socialization,' what do you think of? Socializing, and socialization sound the same, but they have different meanings. Socialization is a process of helping dogs form good associations to the sights, sounds, smells, and potentially scary things in the world around them. The critical socialization window for puppies is approximately 3-16 weeks. Helping a puppy learn how to cope with new things will go a long way in helping to minimize the development of fear, reactivity, and aggression.

1. The process of socialization (exposing your puppy to new people, places, things) should be done slowly, **at your puppy or dog's pace**, without force.
2. If your pup shows signs of fear, pull back a bit to be sure it's a good experience, and learn how to read body language.
3. Dog parks are not an example of socialization – dog parks tend to be chaotic, with dogs who may or may not be appropriate for that intensity, and can create more fear than enjoyment.
4. When introducing to people, let the puppy or dog approach without reaching for the dog, and without interaction. Let the puppy sniff and walk away, and choose to return when comfortable. This is a great way to build trust.
5. Avoid throwing your dog into tense or scary situations. This can backfire and create additional anxiety when faced with anything new.

For a comprehensive description & process of socialization, please visit www.petprofessionalguild.com/resource/puppy-socialization-checklist/ for the handout full of fun ideas and guidance, or call the number below.

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Thomas J. O'Connor
Animal Control & Adoption Center

EQUIPMENT

We have covered the use of aversive equipment in the position statement; however, some equipment can have fallout even if it isn't deliberately designed to inflict pain or discomfort. Below is a brief breakdown of various types of equipment and the associated cautions:

1. **Retractable leashes** seem like a convenient way to offer more freedom to your dog with the flip of a switch, but the convenience also presents some disadvantages to both your dog, and those in the presence of your dog:
 - a. Because the line is spring-loaded, it's very difficult to shorten the leash when you need to act quickly and remove your dog.
 - b. Due to the material, nylon cord or tape, injuries from becoming entangled can be severe as it slices through skin.
 - c. If a dog is able to run while on the line, it will abruptly stop when it reaches the end and potentially cause neck pain or injury.
 - d. If your dog becomes lost while wearing the retractable lead, the plastic handle will bounce behind your dog causing your dog to run in a panic to avoid the plastic 'predator' which will only stop chasing your dog when/if the lead snaps.
 - e. Using a flat, long-lead is a safer option for providing more freedom.
2. **Head collars** are intended to limit pulling. While this might be a short-term aid as your dog learns loose-leash walking, they are not intended as a long-term solution for the following reasons:
 - a. Before using this style of lead, your dog needs to be conditioned to wear it without discomfort or frustration. Conditioning can take time, so if your dog is scratching at the face and trying to remove it, conditioning to create a pleasant association hasn't happened successfully. This kind of experience can create fear and apprehension around walks.
 - b. Fit needs to be precise to avoid irritating the eyes and pulling on facial skin/fur.
 - c. If your dog does pull, or becomes reactive/excited and lunges, it will put added strain on the delicate head, neck, and spine, potentially causing injury.

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4. **Front lead harnesses** are intended to work by redirecting the dog's body toward the guardian. When the shoulders and natural stride are restricted, it can impact your dog's gait with long-term effects. The strap over the shoulder can also create chaffing and pain under the front legs.

For full range of motion, look for a standard Y harness also called a Roman harness. Some brands have straps that are all fully customizable to fit your dog's individual body.

Loose leash walking is something we teach to our dogs through positive reinforcement and practice (see the Leash Skills section). Some are worried that harnesses cause pulling, but pulling is caused by a dog's interest in the world. For more information on the misunderstood 'opposition reflex,' please visit:

<https://eileenanddogs.com/opposition-reflex-is-not-a-reflex/>

(Source: Eileen and Dogs, *'The Opposition Reflex: It's Not a Reflex!'*)



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Animal Control & Adoption Center

LINKS / RESOURCES

Canine Body Language:

www.tjoconnoradoptioncenter.com/resources/dog-resources

Bringing Home a New Adoption/Foster Dog:

www.tjoconnoradoptioncenter.com/resources/bringing-home-a-new-foster/adoption

Lost Dog What to Do:

www.tjoconnoradoptioncenter.com/resources/lost-dogs-what-to-do

Separation Anxiety in Dogs: (Malena DeMartini)

<https://malenademartini.com/about/about-dog-separation-anxiety-and-faqs/>

Poison Control: (ASPCA)

www.asPCA.org/pet-care/asPCA-poison-control

Dog Licensing:

Springfield www.springfield-ma.gov/cos/clerk-dogs

Chicopee <https://chicopeema.gov/180/City-Clerk>

Holyoke www.holyoke.org/clerk-dog-licensing/

MSPCA Services (vaccinations, spay/neuter):

www.mspca.org/programs-resources/springfield-community-outreach/

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