



**PAWS**  
for the **CAUSE**  
Humane Society of El Paso

# K-9 MANUAL

# WELCOME

Thank you for joining the volunteers who help out at the Humane Society of El Paso. Your assistance is very much appreciated and needed. You volunteered your time because of your care and concern for the animals that are housed here. The wag of their tails and the smiles on their faces will let you know that you are appreciated and needed.

However you must be aware that not all of the dogs that are housed here will welcome you with licks and smiles. No matter how hard we try, the situation that these dogs have been placed in is stressful to them. Not all dogs handle it well, and some handle it badly. Not all dogs have benefited from a structured home where discipline was fair and love was plentiful. Not all dogs were born with the best kinds of genes that gave them a gentle disposition and a sunny outlook on life. Even the best dogs can break under the stress of being uprooted from the only life they have known and placed in an environment that is uncertain and scary.

In your daily caring for these animals you need to be aware of several issues: health of the individual animal, how he interacts with his surroundings, and any potential threatening behavior. Being aware of these and reporting any problems, no matter how insignificant they may seem, will help us to understand and resolve any issues, thus assuring that each animal is placed in the best possible adoptive home. The more you learn about the individual animals the more you can help that animal find a forever home.

On the following pages we will go over each important factor, as well as what to look for and how to help, whether it's just gathering the information and reporting it or actually interacting with that animal appropriately. Your time with these wonderful creatures can help them tremendously. Thank you for loving them enough to give them your time.

# HEALTH

Any health issues need to be reported to the office staff. Always have the name of the dog and the kennel number when giving information. This way we will be assured that we are treating the correct animal. Nothing is too insignificant to report. We'd rather check out a false alarm than to have something spread to the other animals that could have been prevented. Here are some things to look for and we rely upon you to be observant of any other issues that you may see.

**Watery eyes:** It may simply be allergies or a breed symptom but it could mean other problems.

**Discharge from the nostrils:** Again, this could be allergies or something more serious.

**Coughing:** This could be just a slight, infrequent cough or gagging sound or more severe.

**Limping:** Be sure to notice which leg is favored and if it seems to be in the shoulder, leg or foot.

**Licking of body parts:** Look for hair that is wet and turning pink.

**Chewing on body parts:** This can be symptomatic of pain or discomfort.

**Blood anywhere on the body:** Find help immediately for any bleeding.

**Swelling:** This can be anything from an injury to an allergic reaction.

**Open wounds or sores:** These could become infected if not taken care of, they may also indicate a problem between dogs in the same kennel.

# **BEHAVIOR**

## **INTERACTING WITH SURROUNDINGS**

How a dog interacts with his surroundings can tell you a lot about how he adjusts to different issues. His flexibility, his attitude and how he handles his daily life lets us know what kind of temperament he has. Even under stress these things stay, basically, the same. So your observance of his interaction is important in helping to place him.

### **INTERACTION WITH YOU**

When you come up to a dog how does he react? Here are some things to look for.

**Does he greet you with an open mouth smile, wagging tail that is level with his body, and generally act excited to see you?**

This is a dog that is fairly confident. He has a happy attitude and, generally, takes things in stride. Even though his life has changed he is accepting of it and is not readily affected by the stress of his surroundings.

**Is his tail wagging but held low? Do his legs seem to be stiff and does he stare at you without glancing away?**

This dog is tense and stressed and not sure how to react to you. He is waiting to see what happens next. If you are calm, quiet and authoritative without staring back at him, he may relax and give you the benefit of the doubt. The best way to approach this type is to speak low and calmly, offer your fist to be sniffed and move towards him with a sideways step. Do not push yourself on him but allow him to come to you.

**Does he back away with his head hung low and then turn away from you?**

This dog is very unsure of himself and worried about what may happen. There are two approaches you can try. One is to walk calmly but with assurance up to the dog. If he tries to get away or starts to bark or growl, stop your movement and see what happens. He will probably move further away from you.

The second approach is to do nothing at all. Stand still, do not stare at the dog, talk calmly and let him decide to approach you. Most times, trust is hard to come by, especially if the dog is very uncertain.

**The dog that rushes the kennel door, with his tail held high, barking and growling or snarling needs special handling. We will discuss this when we talk about threatening behavior.**

## **INTERACTION WITH OTHER DOGS**

How a dog interacts with the dogs in his kennel and with surrounding dogs will tell you a lot about him. Here are some things to look for.

### **Interaction with kennel mates:**

#### **Do the dogs lay huddled together or are they at opposite sides of the kennel?**

If they are lying together then both of them are seeking warmth and comfort from each other. These dogs will, generally, fit in with a multi dog household.

#### **When they are fed does one try to hoard all the food? If so, which one moves away?**

If you see this, please let the staff know so they can make adjustments to assure that each dog receives his share of the food.

#### **When you come up to the kennel door does one of them rush up and push the other out of the way?**

The one who shoves his way in front is a dominant type of dog and the other is submissive. Remember this when talking with people who are thinking of adopting.

#### **Does one dog just sit and wait, letting the other dog do all the barking, jumping and running around?**

This can tell you about the activity level of each dog but also be aware that it could mean a health issue (emotional or physical), so look for underlying causes in this case.

### **Interaction with surrounding dogs:**

#### **Do they jump up to check out the other dogs in nearby kennels?**

If they nose each other, wag tails or act playful then these dogs will, generally get along well with other dogs.

If they bark at, try to bite or claw the other dogs then they are territorial and, generally, have issues with other dogs. This needs to be reported, especially if it seems to escalate in a short period of time.

# **THREATENING (aggressive) BEHAVIOR**

**What causes it?      What does it look like?**  
**What can you do about it?**

## **WHAT CAUSES IT?**

There are several factors that can cause aggressive tendencies in dogs. Some aggressions are only towards other animals; some are only towards humans, sometimes gender specific; and some are towards other animals and humans.

One cause of aggression can be genetic; breeding that has produced these tendencies or has continued the tendency to be aggressive. If breeders do not carefully research the histories of the male and female used for breeding they can reproduce the aggressive gene in a faulty way.

In other cases, aggression may stem from the environment: lack of proper socialization, lack of correct stimulus, lack of appropriate discipline, structure and guidance, and stress of any sort, real or imagined.

And any combination of the above elements may result in aggression. Aggression can be provoked or unprovoked. But no matter what causes it or how it is displayed, it is difficult to deal with.

## **WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?**

**Distance Increasing Signals are designed to gain social distance:**



Assertive, threatening and aggressive behaviors; staring; snarling; ears erect or flat; tension in the body or face; head raised or lowered; urination and ground scratching; tail straight or arched over back; wagging just the tip of the tail or in a short, sharp arch with the tail held up over the back; stalking; a brief look away at a very tense moment.

### **Signals to indicate stress:**

Marking territory; increased activity; scratching; yawning; shaking; sniffing; or looking in a direction away from a perceived threat.

### **Other signs of stress may include:**

Sweaty paw prints; vocalization - whining, growling or frantic barking; dilated pupils; seeing the white rim on the eyes; flaring whiskers; body tension - stiff, rigid appearance and movements, slow movements; muscle ridge around mouth and eyes; no interest in food; excessive or frantic activity level; increased or decreased activity level; shallow breathing; rapid breathing or panting with the corner of the mouth drawn back and facial tension; holding of breath - often a precursor to a bite; excessive, sudden hair loss; drooling; flight reactions; fight reactions; any behavior you have not seen before.

All of the above can be signs of stress that can lead to aggressive behavior. Dogs exhibiting any of these signs need to be evaluated according to what is happening at that moment to determine if these are appropriate or inappropriate behaviors.

### **Dogs use the following signals to attempt to calm a stressful situation, including a personal space violation:**



Yawning



Looking Away



Scratching



Lip Licking

Sniffing; yawning; looking away; scratching; lip licking; nose licking; paw lift; moving slowly in an arc on approach; sitting or laying down; blinking; slow careful movements; shaking; sneezing.

### **WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT IT?**

Dogs that are stressed are in conflict about the outcome of the situation. A dog in a defensive state will very likely halt his attack if you carefully move out of his territory or personal space before he becomes extremely reactive. This is in contrast to the dog who views you as his prey. They will pursue you or try to nip you. These dogs are quieter and have a stalking body posture.

If a dog seems likely to attack, remain non-threatening, but leave the situation as soon as possible from a lateral position, **DO NOT RUN, DO NOT FACE THE DOG, DO NOT TURN YOUR BACK ON THE DOG.** Use a sideways body position. Fold your arms across your chest. **AVOID DIRECT EYE CONTACT**, but keep a close eye on what the dog is doing.

If the dog is showing signs of stress but not out and out aggression do your best to diffuse the situation. Use non threatening body language, keeping your body sideways to the dog. No sudden movements, sometimes standing still will calm the dog. Move away, slowly, a few steps at a time until you can see the dog relax. You are now out of his personal space and you can ask for a behavior that you can reinforce such as “sit”, if the dog knows it.

Once you are aware that a particular dog becomes stressed easily you will be able to manage the circumstances in a way not to make the dog uncomfortable. Do not move into his personal space, continue to breathe calmly, look away and lick your lips. Lower your shoulders and look non-threatening. Remain still until you see the dog relax and then slowly move to a safe spot.

So, after all this, what can you do to help this dog? First, report this to the staff so they are aware of the situation and can alert others to this dog’s behavior. Go back to that dog’s kennel and from outside the kennel door practice calming techniques similar to those that the dog would use:

- turn sideways to the dog, curving your body
- turn your head/eyes away from the dog, blink
- move slowly
- sit
- lick your lips
- yawn
- stretch downward
- attend to the ground (as a dog does when sniffing)

Do not be discouraged if these techniques don’t work right away. Some dogs find it very difficult to trust anyone due to the various circumstances in their lives. Some dogs will never trust anyone. Yes, there are bad dogs and it’s not their fault!

*It’s important to remember that dogs are not people, they don’t think like people, they don’t have the same emotions that we do and they don’t reason things out. Dogs live in the moment, and they react instead of reason.*

## **CLOSING**

We, at the Humane Society of El Paso, are very appreciative of the time you give to our animals. They need the care and concern that you give them. They come here out of no fault of their own and are bewildered and frightened by the loss of the life that they are use to. Any help, attention and care they receive from you will assist them in adjusting to their surroundings until they can be given a forever home. No matter how much time you can give, it is needed and appreciated.