

Whatcom Humane Society

Dog TLC Skills Class

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

- Before you go to see a new dog, always read kennel notes and the previous walker's notes. **Always** record your experience on the volunteer sheet. Report any concerning behavior to Animal Care Staff.
- Keep in mind that space makes dogs feel safe. The greater the space that's available, the safer they feel. Kennels are small, and when we enter their kennels, we encroach on their space and their feeling of safety, thus pushing their stress levels even higher. Stress can create unpredictable behavior in all of us, including dogs.
- **Body language (taken from Sarah Kalnaj's DVD "The language of dogs"):** Learning to read canine body language will help to keep everyone safe (including the dogs). Watch for stress signals, especially clusters of stress signals such as paw raise, licking and yawning, arched back, and tucked tail exhibited together. Clusters of stress signals indicate increasing stress levels in dogs. When you see stress signals, think about what **you** are doing to contribute to their stress. Are you making direct eye contact? Moving quickly? Leaning over the dog? Petting the dog on top of the head? Moving toward the dog? Slow down, back off, take a deep breath, turn sideways to the dog, and give the dog more space to help alleviate the social pressure you are placing on the dog. Toy breeds may just blink over and over rather than showing several different signals clustered together.
 - Mild stress or displacement signals (dog displays familiar behaviors they connect with pleasure, but out of context,

therefore increasing their sense of security):

- Marking territory
 - Fool around (acting very silly, over the top playful, “zoomies”)
 - Stretching
 - Yawning
 - Shaking off
 - Licking lips
 - Sniffing the ground
 - Licking genitals
 - Drinking water
- Distance decreasing signals (Please come closer, I love you, scratch my ears, play with me, etc):
- Play bow
 - Easy, wagging tail in a circle or their whole butt wagging
 - Submissive grin, long commissure (length of mouth)
 - Blinking eyes
 - Squinty eyes
 - Floppy, relaxed roll over
 - Other signs of relaxation: Relaxed face (frown between ears has relaxed, wrinkles around mouth are no longer obvious), eyes are soft, panting has decreased, tail is in a neutral position and wagging (desire to interact), body is loose, ears are neutral or back but not

plastered against the skull, one paw may be lifted.

- Signs of arousal: The dog is excited, but may progress instantly to aggression or over-aroused play—therefore, INCREASE THE DISTANCE between the dog and the focus of his attention. This could be another dog, a person, you, a duck in the field etc.
 - Ears forward
 - Weight forward
 - Direct stare
 - Penile crowning
 - Hackles up
 - Increase in activity
 - Mouth closes
 - Mounting or humping
- Danger signals (Distance INCREASING signals): BACK OFF—DON'T GET CLOSER!!!—may erupt instantly into aggression.
 - High fast tail wag
 - Tail flagged over back, with tip pointing forward (depends on breed of dog. Some breeds always carry their tails this way)
 - Ground scratching
 - Freezing
 - Very brief look away
 - Whale eye

- Head and neck low: resource guarding is usually the cause
 - “Tap out”: **don’t confuse this with the submissive distance decreasing signal of rolling over.** Dog curls down onto floor slowly, shoulder down, then each vertebrae of back makes contact with the floor, tail may be between legs. This is a fearful signal that can suddenly explode into aggression if you approach.
- **Other signs of stress / fear:** frowny face with wrinkles between ears and around mouth—face looks tight and stressed, ears are plastered back on head, back is arched, tail tucked, they might turn their head or body away from the scary thing, body is tense, they might be panting.
 - **Things we can do to reduce stress in dogs:** Avoid bending over dogs, hugging them, and patting them on top of their heads. Rather, stroke their chests, backs, or shoulders. Be calm and reassuring with them. Go slowly when putting on their equipment. **Always ask: “How is this for you?”** when interacting with them.
 - **To keep dogs calm in their kennels:** When looking at dogs from outside their kennels, be aware of your body language. Don’t face them directly, don’t make direct eye contact, do use calming signals such as yawning, licking your lips, blinking, and looking away. Only reinforce behaviors that are calm. E.g. don’t pay attention to dogs who are barking, jumping up etc. Turn away until they are quiet and have 4 paws on the floor. Then praise them, smile, and give them a treat under the door etc., again being aware of your body language.
 - **Every interaction is a training interaction for both you and the dog.** Pay attention to what you are telling them both by initiating behavior and by responding to them—be calm, firm, gentle. Keep your voice low and friendly. Smile (dogs understand smiles as a non-threatening communication). The more excited or aroused a dog is, the calmer and firmer you need to be. “Firm” means keeping verbal cues simple, not engaging in their aroused behaviors, being aloof, and keeping

expectations clear. Reward them only when they do what you ask of them. “Firm” doesn’t mean raising your voice or forcing them to do what you want them to.

- **Entering the kennels:**

- Only enter the kennel when the dog is sitting or has all 4 feet on the floor. Brace the kennel door with your foot when you unlatch the karabiner. Once in the kennel, only **interact** with the dog when all 4 feet are on the floor or when the dog is sitting. You may need to lure them into a sit with a cookie immediately upon entering the kennel if they are very excited.
- With dogs you don’t know, talk to them from outside the kennel reassuringly first and give them treats when they are calm. IF they are worried—ears back, tail tucked, back arched, or excited, barking at you, or jumping up—work with them first from outside the kennel until their stress signals decrease. Kennels are small spaces for dogs to meet and greet you.

- **Putting on the harness:** * Before you enter the kennel, assess which hallway/exit you will take from the shelter. If there are many reactive dogs in the row, or if your dog is reactive, it is best to close the guillotines of the dog kennels between you and the exit BEFORE you enter the kennel to harness your dog. Then the neighboring dogs will be in the front of their kennels, and you can safely exit out the BACK of your dog’s kennel. When you’re ready to exit the shelter, take your dog out the back of the kennel and make a mental note of which kennel it is so you can return the dog to the correct one. (There are number on the backs of the kennels.) This way, the dogs will be more relaxed, and their adrenalin and cortisol levels will stay lower by avoiding the lunging and barking they would experience otherwise.

- o **Harnessing excited dogs:** Have the harness ready to place on the dog and a cookie in your hand before you enter the kennel. Attaching the leash to the harness prior to entering can be helpful—or not. Decide what works for you. Lure the dog’s head through the harness

with a cookie. Sometimes working quickly helps with a very excited dog, but sometimes moving slowly and being calm, turning away from the dog so you are always sideways to him will help to calm him down. You may need to switch sides with the dog so you can reach under his chest to grasp the belly strap to complete your task. Toss cookies on the floor to keep him occupied and comfortable while you do up the quick-release snap. If you need to try again, just maneuver him back into position, toss another handful of cookies on the floor, and make another attempt. Take your time! It can take several tries to complete harnessing and that's OK. Avoid wrapping your arms around the dog to do up the harness but rather reach under the chest/belly as you would to saddle a horse.

- o **Harnessing fearful dogs:** If the dog you want to harness is very fearful, have a staff member or another volunteer who knows the dog harness the dog for you and introduce you to him in the GA room.
 - o If you can't get help and the dog is **not** too fearful, move slowly and stand sideways to him until he approaches you in a relaxed manner. Toss him treats rather than trying to get him to approach you. Crouching down may help, but this might make some dogs more anxious. It also places your face closer to the dog's mouth. Once he approaches you with interest, allow him to sniff you without trying to touch or feed him. You may drop treats when he is finished, and if he stays close, offer him treats from your hand. If he is fine with that, feed him treats off the harness, then have him take treats through the opening of his harness, gradually increasing the distance that his nose pushes through each time. Remove the harness completely between attempts to put the harness on him, and if he is becoming increasingly stressed, take a break or leave the kennel. Removing the harness from his head between attempts to put it on him will decrease his stress, and in addition will give him practice having his harness pass over his head. You may not be able to get the harness on him the first day you go to see him. Even though you are not walking the dog, you are building his trust and confidence in humans.

- **Returning to the kennel:**
 - o Most dogs go back in their kennels easily, and tossing treats on the floor will entertain them until you can get out. Show him the cookies and be sure you have high value treats so he will be interested in them. Be ready with your hand on the door lever to exit the kennel before you toss the treats so you can slip out while he's distracted.
 - o Some dogs may do better licking a stuffed Kong while you exit, but you will have to think ahead and stuff the Kong before you harness the dog. Stuff with a combo of kibble (soaked or not) and peanut butter. Don't use much peanut butter as it's bad for them, but dollops to help the kibble adhere between layers of kibble is high value for most dogs. Get the dog interested in the Kong, and then place it on the floor and leave the kennel.
 - o Some dogs are escape artists. You can try taking them into a Get Acquainted room, take their harness off, and attach their leash to their collar only. Make sure the collar is snug enough to not slip over their head. Toss high-value treats into their kennel and **without entering** the kennel, unclip the leash and close the door when the dog goes in to investigate. You might need to get help with some dogs to get them back into the kennel. Having someone call the dog from the back of the kennel will usually give you time to exit.
- **Walking dogs: ALWAYS TAKE LOTS OF TREATS WITH YOU (as well as plastic bags)**
 - o **Leaving the kennel:** Always check for other dogs/people/kids before exiting the kennel with the dog. If you need to, remember to close the guillotines on kennels between you and the exit before entering the kennel to harness the dog. Keep your body between the kennels and the dog you are walking if you can, keeping your dog on a SHORT leash. Feeding treats, holding a Kong for them to lick, or tossing treats on the floor ahead of them might help to get them past the kennels without lunging and barking. If they get around you and start lunging at the dogs in the kennels, don't get back between the dog you're walking and the kennels (due to the risk of a redirected bite). Just get to the exit as quickly as possible, pulling the dog with

you if you have to. If this happens, put a note on the green sheet about the difficult exit and a recommendation to close the guillotines of adjacent kennels in the future.

- Always check for dogs on the other side of the doors before going through a doorway, and be sure all 4 paws are on the floor. At every doorway and every hallway intersection, call out in a loud voice, “Dog coming through!” Lure the dog back to you with treats as soon as you are through the door so that he is facing you. This way you can check out the environment before proceeding.
- Keep your dog on your right side when crossing the parking lot past the stray kennels. Move them quickly past the exercise yard, tossing treats on the ground to distract them as you pass, especially if a reactive dog is in the yard, or if you are walking a reactive dog. If you want to go to the Play Yard, you might need to wait until they are both yards are empty if the dog you are walking is reactive, or if the dog in one of the Play Yards is reactive. It’s not good for either dog to be placed in a situation where they are afraid of, or angry at, the dog in the adjacent PY.
- **Increased arousal levels:** Anything can cause increased arousal levels. The higher the arousal level, the more difficult it is to control the dog, and the closer to aggression the dog becomes. Shelter dogs are stressed, so it is important to keep their arousal levels low.
 - Things that can increase arousal levels:
 - High energy displays on the handler’s part—**running**, excited voices, high squeaky voice, intentionally getting the dog excited by rough housing, clapping hands etc.
 - Encroaching on the dog’s space—bending over the dog, touching a dog who doesn’t like to be touched.
 - Too much training.
 - Boredom.

- Walking close to another dog—this can be excitement either because the dog likes other dogs, or because he has fear-based reactivity.
- Seeing another dog running in the Play Yard (if you have a dog in the Play Yard and a volunteer is having a difficult time walking a dog past the PYs, STOP playing with your dog, have him sit, and feed him cookies.)
- Loud noises in the distance
- Food rewards
- Frustration
- Excited play in the yard.
- To decrease arousal levels:
 - Breathe deeply
 - Slow down
 - Stand up straight
 - Speak slowly and calmly in a low voice
 - Don't get excited
 - Turn sideways
 - Avoid direct eye contact
 - Keep arousal levels low with dogs you haven't walked before, until you get to know them.
 - Avoid other dog walkers
 - Don't take a new dog who hasn't been walked before into a Play Yard. If they have been walked, when reading the green sheet, take note of how they've acted previously in the PY.
 - Play "find it".

- o **Play Yard:** I would recommend getting to know the dog you are walking before taking him in the Play Yard. Some overstimulated dogs can be overwhelming with jumping up and body slamming when off leash.
 - o **Don't take small dogs off leash in the PY.** There are many birds of prey (especially hawks and eagles) who hunt in the area, and small dogs are fair game.
 - o Don't take dogs out to the Play Yard to run within an hour of eating, or offer large amounts of water during play. Any strenuous exercise with full stomachs can cause bloat in deep-chested dogs—40% fatality rate, even if treated immediately. Some breeds such as German Shepherds and Great Danes are especially prone.
 - o Be careful about walking dogs on the pavement and exercising them in hot weather. Their pads can get burned on pavement, and they are inefficient at cooling themselves in warm temperatures (especially with exertion), which can quickly lead to hyperthermia. This can also be fatal.
- **Training skills:**
 - **Using a marker:** Using a clicker or marker word, “yes,” marks the precise instant your dog does the behavior that you want. By following the marker with a treat within 2 seconds, the marker becomes “charged”. Dopamine is released by the brain in response to the click (or “yes”) in anticipation of the treat. Dopamine, a pleasure hormone, is the actual reward, but the treat **MUST** follow the marker to create anticipation in the dog and therefore the release of dopamine.
 - o The marker speeds up learning, is neutral in that it has no emotional baggage associated with it, and stimulates the ‘seeking circuit’ in the brain, which creates excitement about this method of learning. The marker also marks good behavior instantly, so the dog understands exactly what he did right. Many shelter dogs are too stressed to take treats, but following the marker with sniffing, giving him attention, or allowing him to do anything else he finds pleasurable, is also effective.

- **Release word:** “That’ll do” tells your dog that he can stop doing what you asked of him.
- **Attention:** Have your dog sit in front of you to begin this exercise. As soon as he makes eye contact, mark and treat. If he is having difficulty making eye contact, lure his eyes up to your face using a cookie. Mark and treat when he makes eye contact. (A dog who makes eye contact with visitors is more likely to get adopted).
- **Cookie sit:** Place the cookie just above your dog’s nose and move it slowly back toward his tail. As his haunches hit the ground mark it with “yes”, give him the cookie and release him by using your release word and throwing a cookie on the floor a few feet away. Once he is doing this consistently, say “sit” just before his haunches hit the ground. Treat when he’s in position.
 - If he won’t sit as you move the cookie back toward his tail, mark approximations of the behavior, such as looking upward toward the cookie, or bending his back legs slightly. Always follow the marker word with a treat. Marker word must ALWAYS come first.
- **Cookie down:** With your dog in a sit, place a cookie right in front of his nose and move it slowly from his nose down to his toes and slide it along the ground away from him. As soon as his elbows touch the ground, say “yes” and give him the cookie by dropping it on the ground. You do not want him to get up until you release him, so drop several cookies between his paws initially to keep him in the down position. Praise and repeat the word ‘down’. If he is very reluctant to go down, mark and treat approximations such as his head moving downward while his haunches are still on the ground, one paw extending forward, going half way down etc. Praise and release using your release word.
- **Take it/Leave it:** Offer your dog a treat and tell him ‘take it’. Repeat two or three times. Then, holding your hand steady, ask him in a light voice to ‘leave it’. Use the same tone of voice you used for ‘take it’. Do not release the treat. Wait until he backs off in frustration. Immediately mark with “yes” and tell him ‘take it’ as you give him the treat. Do a few more ‘take its’ and then a ‘leave it’. Repeat.

- **Leash walking:** All dogs are much more relaxed on a loose leash. Tight leashes increase anxiety and aggression in dogs. The following exercises are ways to teach loose-leash walking. Some dogs may do better with one type of exercise than another. Try them out.
 - o To keep your dog on a loose leash:
 - o Lure/reward heeling: Lure your dog into heel position with treats and praise, feed him, then allow him to range and sniff at the end of his leash for short periods. Do not move forward if the leash is taut. Do not jerk on the leash. The dog gets rewarded either with a treat or by allowing him to move forward when he returns to you.
 - o ‘Red light/Green light’: Walk with your dog and as soon as the leash becomes taut, stop. Do not move forward until the leash loosens. Praise and move forward as soon as it is loose.
 - o Change speed and direction: Make rapid changes in speed and direction, moving smoothly. Do not jerk on the leash. Praise your dog as soon as he is with you. Your dog will start to follow you because he is confused by your behavior.
 - o Baby steps: Start by luring your dog into a sit. Praise. Ignore all other behavior until your dog sits. Take one step, stand still until he sits again. Repeat until your dog sits promptly with each step. Then take 2 steps and repeat, then 5 steps, then 8 steps. Your dog can be lured into a sit, but eventually should sit each time you stop. With some very excitable dogs, this may be the only way to proceed.
- **Recall (Come):** Say your dog’s name clearly, then ‘come’. Mark as soon as he turns to approach you, and then run away from him. Treat with a jackpot and praise when he gets to you, keeping treats LOW so he doesn’t jump on you. Use the word ‘come’ whenever your dog is coming toward you. Don’t ask for a sit if this is a new cue for him.
- **Find it:** Toss a treat on the ground, and keeping your body parallel to the dogs’, point to the treat and say “find it”. Repeat. You might have to put your finger almost up to the treat to point it out to him at first, but

be careful not to crowd or lean over the dog when you are doing this. This is a very important stress-reducing skill for the dogs to learn. It redirects their attention away from you (or whatever they are concerned about), gets them searching for something (a powerful dopamine reinforcement), and puts their heads down (a calming position for them and for other dogs in the area).

- **Jumping up:**
 - Stage 1: Turn away from him and completely withdraw from him emotionally and physically. Start walking again when all 4 paws are on the ground.
 - Stage 2: If the dog is persistent, step on the leash, take a few deep breaths, talk calmly to the dog and walk confidently back to the shelter when the dog has settled, keeping arousal levels very low.
 - Stage 3: If you can't stop the dog from jumping and mouthing (rarely, some dogs will get into a frenzy of jumping and mouthing/biting due to a combination of stress and frustration), step on the leash and try to calm him as outlined above in Stage 2. Then try "Find it". Move slowly toward a post, keeping your body parallel to the dog. Attach the dog to a post, and stand sideways to the dog, take deep breaths, don't look at him directly, yawn, and toss treats on the ground to help calm him. Once he's calm you can try to walk him back to the shelter doing "find it." If that doesn't work, step on the leash and call the shelter (360-733-2080, then extension 0. Be sure it's on your home screen). If the shelter is closed, call 911 and ask for the dispatcher at WHS. They will connect you with Animal Control, so you can get the assistance you need. Shouting at the dog or pushing him off will increase his arousal levels and worsen the problem.
 - Dogs who display this behavior should be RED dogs. Be sure to let staff know about the behavior and make detailed notes on the green sheet.
- **Mouthing the leash:** Shorten the leash. Work on Take it/leave it. Decrease arousal levels by withdrawing from the dog physically and

emotionally. Redirect him to a stick or toy. Use a chain leash for chronic leash biters. Dogs can bite through a leash in seconds.

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