

#### Shelter Dog Mod Squad: Identifying and Modifying Canine Problem Behaviors in Shelters

Sheila D'Arpino, DVM
Diplomate, American College of Veterinary Behaviorists
<a href="https://www.centerforshelterdogs.org">www.centerforshelterdogs.org</a>

## Our Mission: Behavior Mod Squad

Identify potential problems

Make outcome decisions

Optimize welfare

Behavior modification

Reassessment

Rehoming

Follow-up

Shelter Dogs

## Our Mission: Behavior Mod Squad

#### Optimize welfare

Identify potential problems

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# Meet Nellie...



1.5 year spayed female Rat Terrier, 11#

Owner surrender: can no longer care of

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#### Brody



1 year neutered male mixed breed dog, 65#

Previously adopted as 'jumpy mouthy' dog. Returned for biting owner four times.

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**Optimize Welfare** 

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## Getting to Know the Dogs

Behavior History
Behavior Evaluation
Shelter Behavior/Behavioral
Observations



#### Assessment and Decision Making

#### The Match-Up II Shelter Dog Rehoming Program

Uses all available information about dog's behavior...

Behavior in previous home (behavioral history) Behavior evaluation results Behavior observed in shelter



....to help guide treatment and placement decisions.

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## Match-Up II Components

**Behavior History** 

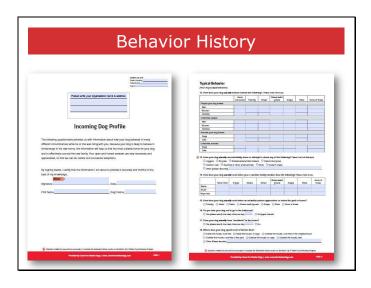
**Behavior Evaluation** 

Personality Scoring

Behavior in the Shelter

Behavioral Triage

|  | Dogs |
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#### **Behavior Evaluation**

11 subtests

Objective: based on observations of behaviors,

not interpretation

Behaviors either occur or they don't



- 1. Behavioral History
- 2. Behavior Evaluation
- 3. Personality Scoring
- 4. Behavior in the Shelter
- 5. Behavioral Triage



#### Online Data Entry For subtest 6, if the dog bites the rubber hand at any point, STOP! If the dog displays warning signals such as a growl, lip lift, or snap, you may continue the sub-test, if comfortable, in order to see if the dog escalates to more aggressive behavior, stays at the same levely, of discontinues. If at any point there is concern about safety, STOP! Medium and large dogs (over 40 pounds) should be telthered to the wall or a don. Tether should be of feet in length. Toy and small dogs (under 40 pounds) can be held on a leash by the recorder or tethered. If dog shows teeth, growls, snaps, or bites on any part of the subtest, indicate which part: Fart 1: Wet Pools Fill the bowl 's full with wet food. Using the rubber hand, the handler pushes the bowl just inside the limit of the tether (so that there is no tension on the leash). Allow the dog to begin eating for at leas 2 seconds. Position the rubber hand on the handler's body as indicated in Sub-Test 7 and, with hand hanging down, walk past the dog and the bowl and return, observing the dog's reaction. Read more Observed Behaviors (check all that apply) Food Body Crouch Lip Lick Eat food Wag Tail Stop eating before hand Tuck Tail E Grab Leash Tremble Show Teeth Ears Back Inhibited Bite Stop eating and back away after hand introduced Vocalizations Whine Uninhibited Bite Eat food faster after hand

#### Shelter Behavior/Behavioral Observations

Behavior toward staff, volunteers and public (men, children)

Behavior on walks

Behavior during training

Behavior during any further assessments of problems

Behavior toward other animals



- 1. Behavioral History
- 2. Behavior Evaluation
- 3. Personality Scoring
- 4. Behavior in the Shelter
- 5. Behavioral Triage



#### Behavioral Triage

Incorporates all information known about each dog and gives points for behaviors

Behavioral history

Behavior evaluation

Behavior in the shelter

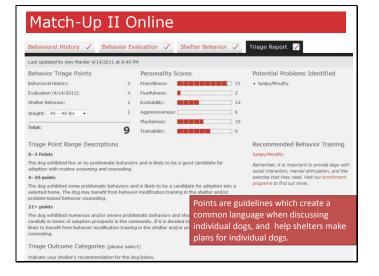
Consideration for weight

#### Points calculated automatically

Higher points means a potentially more challenging adoption

- 1. Behavioral History
- 2. Behavior Evaluation
- 3. Personality Scoring
- 4. Behavior in the Shelter
- 5. Behavioral Triage





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# Nellie



Total Behavior Triage Points: 43

<u>Behavior history</u> **+21** (shown teeth/growled snapped men, women, children, shown teeth/growled at vet or groomer, flagged to urinate/defecate when alone),

<u>Behavior evaluation</u> +13 (Room Behavior +1: jump up; Room Behavior Part 2 +1: jump up; Toddler Doll +6: growl; Strange Woman +6: growl)

<u>Shelter behavior</u> +12 (shown teeth/growled men, women, shows fear such as cower run away or tremble, soft mouthed or jumped up)

Weight -3 (< 15 lbs)

#### **Potential Problem Behaviors**

Aggression to Adults/Children Fear of people

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Fear of Being Alone (separation anxiety) Aggression toward veterinarian

#### **Brody**



Total Behavior Triage Points: 44

Behavior history +20 ( +12 bite adults, +8 for growl toward unfamiliar children)

Behavior evaluation +21 (+2 for soft mouths on room and feet, +2 for jump ups on toys and strange looking women, +1 for jump up and soft mouth on run and freeze, +8 for inhibited bite on wet food, +8 for inhibited bite on pig's ears)

Weight +3

#### **Potential Problem Behaviors**

Jumpy Mouthy Food Aggression Aggression to Adults Aggression to children



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# Accuracy of Assessments

Behavior History Behavior Evaluation Behavior Observations

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# **Accuracy of Assessments**



Standardization Reliability Validity



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# Accuracy of Assessments Stress Environment Personality

# Accuracy of Assessments

Frequency

Skill/knowledge of evaluator

# The Behavior

How fair is it to focus primarily on negative behaviors?

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# Outcome Decisions:

Make Decisions Based Upon...



Individual Dogs

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Because Every Dog is Different

# Outcome Decisions: Make Decisions Based Upon...



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Shelter's Capacity for Care

# Outcome Decisions: Make Decisions Based Upon...



Shelter's Ability to SAFELY Rehome the Dog

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# Nellie Outcome



Foster
Whines when left alone
Aggression over rawhide
Contact former owner
Says she is OK when left with dog
Confirms anxiety when crated
Confirms fear of loud noises
Confirms food aggression

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#### Nellie Outcome



Special Adoption for:
Separation anxiety (potential)
Fear of people
Food aggression
Monitor and regularly reassess
anxiety

#### **Brody Outcome**



LOTS of debate within the shelter
Previous owner used dominance
theory/techniques
B Mod while in shelter
Foster
Initially with Dr. D'Arpino

Next with experienced volunteer
No problems in foster



#### **Brody Outcome**



Special adoption for:
Aggression to adults
Food aggression
Jumpy Mouthy
Mild fear of unknown people
Stay in foster until adoption





**Behavior Modification** 

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## Starting a Behavior Modification Plan

Is a plan needed?



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Or is matching to the right home most important?

## Goal of Behavior Modification Programs



Assess risk

Determine response to behavior modification

Determine type of adopter that is best for pet

Pets are usually NOT cured via behavior modification plans

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## **Evaluate your Resources**



## Begin with....

Plans and protocols Staff training Volunteer training



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# Staff Training

Dog body language
Dog handling and safety
Assessing welfare
Assessing and recording behavior
Principles of training and b mod
Behavioral tools (and humane use)





Behavior Modification for Jumpy Mouthy Dogs









#### Behavior Modification for Fearful Dogs





#### The Plan

Initial training with highly experienced/trained staff and volunteers ONLY



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#### Training Plan for Nellie















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# Training Staff about Fear of People

#### What TO do

Create positive associations Avoid fear inducing stimuli

#### What NOT to do

No aversives No 'dominance theory' Don't force interactions

# Medication for Problem Behaviors

Primary indications for medication:
Poor welfare
Severe anxiety

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Medication for Problem Behaviors

# Medication for Brody?



## Medication for Nellie?



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#### Considerations

Explore options for enrichment Explore options for change of environment

office foster foster home

Would this dog need medication if not in the shelter??

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# Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (i.e., Fluoxetine, Sertraline, Paroxetine)

Blocks serotonin reuptake from synaptic cleft

Increased serotonin

Used to decrease anxiety, aggression, impulsivity - long term relief Labeled for use in separation anxiety Takes days to weeks to begin working

Dose: Fluoxetine - 0.5-2 mg/kg sid

#### Trazodone

SARI: Serotonin antagonist (blocks receptors) and reuptake inhibitor
Can be used as adjunct to primary medication such as SSRI (longterm effects)
Side effects uncommon

Dose: 1-5 mg/kg bid, titrate to effect

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#### Medication?



None were used

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#### Medication?



Fluoxetine 1 mg/kg po sid



#### Reassessment

#### Treatment Duration/Other Considerations

Most dogs respond within 1-2 days

Continued treatment while the dog is in the shelter is crucial

Jumpy Mouthy dogs are often more likely to be returned than many other more serious problem behaviors



## How to Assess Progress

Day to day interactions?

Repeat behavior evaluation?

Send to 'real life' (foster home) environment?



#### Rehoming

#### Finding the Right Home

Place pets for adoption that will be safe (not bite or harm) for people in your community

Match the pet to an appropriate adopter

Inform and educate adopters

Be honest and realistic

Be FLEXIBLE



## Adoption- Jumpy Mouthy Dogs



The right home is crucial
Active people
People who enjoy
training dogs
People who are willing
to invest time, energy,
and effort

#### Adoption- Fear of People



The right home is crucial Quiet home Understanding of fearful dog needs Patient people

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#### Risks and Benefits

The only way to GUARANTEE that you will not have a pet with a problem is to not own a pet





Aggression (and problem behaviors) is a risk with ANY adoption. Our goal is to do everything possible to reduce that risk.

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#### The Special Adoption Appointment

Full disclosure

Demonstrate the problem

Discuss/teach plan for management (NOT treatment), and give handouts







## Follow-Up

50% discount on training classes through our shelter

Free behavior appointments for six months after adoption

Phone calls and emails

Adopter knows that we are 'on their team'

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#### Nellie





http://www.centerforshelterdogs.org/Home/News/ShelterDogsBlog/tabid/79/mid/654 /articleld/127/ctl/ReadCSDBlog/Default.aspx

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#### Brody

