

behavior modification protocols

One of a series of ASPCA® Behavior Modification Protocols modified by Emily Weiss, Ph.D., CAAB (Original program developed by Dee Ganley, CPDT and Nancy Lyon at the Upper Valley Humane Society)



aggression behind the kennel door

The goal of this program is to decrease aggression behind the kennel door.

identifying dogs for the program:

- The dog was SAFER™ assessed and meets the adoption criteria at your facility.
- The dog aggresses at the kennel door towards people or dogs, but his eyes are soft, ears back, and lip is long. His body posture is likely backwards, facing away from kennel door.
- When the kennel door is open, the dog runs to the rear of the kennel and keeps a sideways stance to the kennel door and keeps soft body posture.

before you begin:

- Provide extra kennel enrichment for the dog.
- Identify what triggers the aggressive response at the kennel door (i.e. dogs, people, people wearing hats, etc.). Most commonly in the shelter environment dogs are reactive to people and dogs.
- Place a treat cup on the door and be sure that staff and volunteers have treat bags or treats in their pockets at all times.

program instructions:

1. Place a visual barrier, such as a blanket or nylon panel, over the kennel door of the reactive dog.
2. When the stimulus (most likely yourself or a person with a dog on leash) that causes reactivity in the kenneled dog passes by the kennel door, toss a high value treat under the door when there is a noted decrease in reactivity (i.e. the dog is quieter). You may have to stand in front of the kennel door and wait for a decrease in reactivity prior to tossing in a treat and walking away. Remember to keep a sideways stance in relation to the dog and kennel door. Repeat this each time the aversive stimulus passes by. Staff and volunteers should go about their daily routine, but be aware of the reactive dog and toss treats into kennel accordingly for decreased reactivity. (Note: If you choose to walk away from the kennel door while the dog is reactive, you're rewarding the reactive behavior and will have an increased difficulty in modifying the behavior).
3. When there is a marked decrease in reactivity and you notice the dog approaching the kennel door with a loose body posture as the aversive stimulus passes by the kennel door, slightly raise the visual barrier so that the dog can see a few inches under the barrier.
4. Toss treats under the kennel door for a noted decrease in reactivity each time the aversive stimulus passes by the kennel door. You may have to stand in front of the kennel door and wait for a decrease in reactivity prior to tossing in a treat and walking away.
5. Repeat the above procedure until the dog is standing at the kennel door relaxed with no visual barrier and the aversive stimulus passes by.
6. Before the dog can be placed on the adoption floor, be sure that he replicates relaxed behavior at the kennel door in at least 3 different kennels including his adoption floor kennel.
7. Place a treat cup on his kennel door so that adopters can toss treats in his kennel as they walk by.
8. Keep a daily behavior log.