

Shelter Dog Behavior Assessment

Canine Behavior Evaluation Form

Date _____ Shelter _____ Dog's Name / ID # _____
Sex _____ Age _____ Breed _____ History _____
Evaluator _____ Observer/cribe _____

**** RESPONSES IN BOLD ITALICS INDICATE SEVERE RED-FLAG BEHAVIOR THAT MAY REQUIRE THE DOG BE PUT FOR ADOPTION**

Cage Presentation Test - while dog is still in kennel. Tester should not have interacted with dog in past.

Step #1 - Stand quietly in front of the kennel run, turned side-ways, look straight ahead, not at the dog. Watch out of corner of eye for 5 seconds.

Step #2 - Turn and face the dog, hand at the waist and look directly into his eyes for 5 seconds.

Step #3 - Turn sideways, bend down and talk to the dog in a friendly, solicitous tone of voice for 5 seconds.

BEHAVIORAL RESPONSE	STEP 1	STEP 2	STEP 3
remains calm with relaxed body posture (low wagging tail, soft eyes)			
displays avoidance techniques (turns head sideways, diverts eyes)			
displays fearful body posture (ears back, tail down, body low, backing up)			
comes towards front of cage in a calm solicitous manner (loose relaxed body)			
comes towards front of cage suspiciously (moving slowly, head down, ears back)			
comes forward excitedly - jumping on the front of the cage			
stays in place - barking			
moves forward - barking			
moves away - barking			
stays in the back of the kennel run - shaking, low growl, white eye			
moves away, towards the back of run - shaking, low growl, white eye			
Displays defensive aggression - hurls, growls, bares teeth with fearful body posture (stiffened front, tucked tail, ears back, white eye) while moving away			
Displays offensive aggression - hurls, growls, barks with offensive body posture (high tail, direct eye contact, ears erect) while charging/moving forward			

BEFORE PROCEEDING: - Take the dog for a short walk to make sure he has eliminated if needed.

Sociability Test - Take the dog to the evaluation room - let him sniff around for a few moments.

- Holding the end of the leash - stand and totally ignore the dog for 60 seconds - watch dog so that if he looks up at you, you can give him soft solicitous eye contact.
 - dog made calm social contact lasting more than 2 seconds
 - how many times? _____ longest amount of time? _____
 - eye contact _____ jumped on you _____ leered against you (circle)
 - dog made inappropriate type social contact lasting more than 2 seconds
 - how many times? _____ longest amount of time? _____
 - jumped all over you _____ barked/seeking _____ trampled/punched (circle)
 - dog made non-social contact less than 2 seconds at a time (drive by, sniff)
 - dog completely ignored you and continued to investigate the environment

Shelter dog behavior assessment is a critical process in determining the temperament and suitability of dogs for adoption. As shelters are often the final refuge for many animals, understanding their behavior is essential for finding them the right homes and ensuring that they can integrate well into family life. This article will explore the importance of behavior assessments, the methods used to evaluate shelter dogs, and how these assessments can benefit both the dogs and potential adopters.

Understanding Shelter Dog Behavior Assessment

Behavior assessment is the systematic evaluation of a dog's temperament, personality, and behavioral tendencies. In a shelter environment, this process becomes crucial for several reasons:

- Improving Adoption Rates:** By accurately assessing a dog's behavior, shelters can better match dogs with potential adopters, increasing the likelihood of successful adoptions.
- Identifying Behavioral Issues:** Some dogs may have behavioral problems that need addressing before they can enter a new home. Identifying these issues allows shelters to provide necessary training or care.
- Ensuring Safety:** Understanding a dog's behavior helps to ensure the safety of shelter staff, volunteers, and other animals. It can prevent incidents that may occur due to fear or aggression.

4. Enhancing Dog Welfare: Proper assessments can lead to tailored enrichment activities for dogs, improving their overall well-being while in shelter care.

Methods of Behavior Assessment

Shelter dog behavior assessments can vary widely in method and approach. However, most assessments typically include both observational and interaction-based evaluations. Here are some common methods:

1. Observational Assessments

Observational assessments involve watching a dog in a controlled environment, usually within the shelter or an isolated space. Key behaviors to watch include:

- Body Language: Signs of comfort, stress, or aggression, such as tail position, ear position, and overall posture.
- Reactivity: How the dog responds to sudden noises or movements, other dogs, and people.
- Social Skills: Interactions with shelter staff and volunteers, including friendliness, playfulness, and approachability.

2. Interaction-Based Assessments

Interaction-based assessments involve direct engagement with the dog. This can encompass:

- Leash Walking: Testing how well the dog walks on a leash and responds to commands while being taken for a walk.
- Play Behavior: Assessing the dog's willingness to engage in play and how the dog interacts with toys and other dogs.
- Handling Tests: Evaluating how the dog reacts to being touched or handled, which can be important for future grooming and veterinary visits.

3. Standardized Behavior Assessment Tools

Some shelters utilize standardized behavior assessment tools developed by experts in animal behavior. These tools offer structured methods to evaluate a dog's behavior and can include:

- The Canine Behavior Assessment and Research Questionnaire (C-BARQ): A widely used tool that asks shelter staff and volunteers about observed behaviors.
- The SAFER Assessment: A standardized method that includes seven test items that evaluate a dog's behavior toward people and other dogs.

Key Elements to Consider in Assessments

When conducting behavior assessments, several key elements should be considered to ensure a comprehensive evaluation:

1. Environment

The shelter environment can influence a dog's behavior. High stress levels due to noise, confinement, and the presence of other animals may affect how a dog behaves during assessments. It's important to conduct assessments in a calm, quiet setting to get more accurate results.

2. Individual Differences

Every dog is unique, and their behavior can be influenced by various factors, including breed, age, past experiences, and personality. Assessors should take these individual differences into account when interpreting assessment results.

3. Stress and Anxiety Levels

Dogs in shelters often experience stress and anxiety, which can impact their behavior. Assessors should observe how dogs cope with stress and whether they show signs of fear, aggression, or withdrawal.

Benefits of Shelter Dog Behavior Assessments

The implementation of effective behavior assessments in shelters offers numerous benefits:

1. Enhanced Matching Process

By understanding a dog's temperament, shelters can make more informed decisions about which dogs are a good fit for specific families or individuals. This leads to a higher likelihood of successful adoptions and reduces the chances of dogs being returned to the shelter.

2. Tailored Training and Support

For dogs identified with behavioral issues, shelters can provide tailored training and support to address these challenges. This not only improves the dog's chances of adoption but also

helps ensure a smoother transition into a new home.

3. Increased Adoption Satisfaction

Adopters who receive detailed information about a dog's behavior are generally more satisfied with their adoption experience. When potential owners understand a dog's needs and personality, they are better equipped to meet those needs, leading to a happier life for both the dog and the owner.

4. Community Education

Behavior assessments can also serve as an educational tool for the community. By sharing the results of assessments, shelters can educate potential adopters about dog behavior, helping to foster a deeper understanding of canine needs and expectations.

Challenges in Shelter Dog Behavior Assessment

Despite the benefits, there are challenges associated with behavior assessments in shelters:

1. Resource Limitations

Many shelters operate on tight budgets and may lack the resources to perform comprehensive behavior assessments or provide necessary training for staff.

2. Time Constraints

Shelter staff often juggle multiple responsibilities, limiting the time available to conduct thorough assessments. This can lead to rushed evaluations and potentially inaccurate conclusions.

3. High Turnover Rates

The high turnover rate of dogs in shelters can make it difficult to conduct assessments consistently. Dogs may be adopted quickly or may have limited time in the shelter, requiring assessments to be done swiftly.

Conclusion

Shelter dog behavior assessment is a vital process that plays a significant role in improving the outcomes for dogs in shelters. By understanding a dog's behavior and personality, shelters can enhance adoption rates, ensure the safety of all involved, and ultimately improve the quality of life for the dogs in their care. While challenges exist, the implementation of effective assessment methods and tools can lead to a more successful and fulfilling adoption process for both dogs and their new families. By prioritizing these assessments, shelters can continue to make strides in their mission to find loving homes for every dog in their care.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a shelter dog behavior assessment?

A shelter dog behavior assessment is a systematic evaluation process used to observe and analyze a dog's behavior in a shelter environment. This assessment helps to identify the dog's temperament, socialization skills, and potential issues, guiding potential adopters and staff in making informed decisions.

Why is it important to assess shelter dog behavior?

Assessing shelter dog behavior is crucial for ensuring the safety and well-being of both the dog and potential adopters. It helps in matching dogs with suitable homes, reducing the chances of returns, and improving overall adoption success rates.

What are common behaviors assessed in shelter dogs?

Common behaviors assessed in shelter dogs include aggression, fearfulness, sociability with people and other animals, playfulness, response to commands, and stress reactions in various situations.

How is a shelter dog behavior assessment conducted?

A shelter dog behavior assessment is typically conducted by trained staff or volunteers who observe the dog in a controlled environment. This may include interactions with people, other dogs, and the use of specific tests or exercises to evaluate responses.

What tools or methods are used in dog behavior assessments?

Tools and methods used in dog behavior assessments can include standardized testing protocols, observation checklists, and behavioral scales, as well as interactive play sessions and socialization exercises to gauge the dog's reactions and temperament.

How can shelter dog behavior assessments benefit

potential adopters?

Behavior assessments provide potential adopters with valuable insights into a dog's personality, compatibility with their lifestyle, and any behavioral challenges that may need to be addressed, helping them make a more informed and suitable choice.

What should adopters consider after a dog behavior assessment?

After a dog behavior assessment, adopters should consider the dog's specific needs, including training requirements, exercise levels, and potential behavioral issues. It's also important to ask the shelter for recommendations on how to best support the dog's transition into a new home.

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