



Playing for Life!

A Shelter's Training
Program
featuring
Canine Play Groups
presented by

Aimee Sadler
Director of Training & Behavior



Our Philosophy

*Before we can expect a dog to
cope and thrive,
we need to satisfy them
at some level.*



We're talking **RESOURCES**

- Each shelter/rescue functions in a different capacity
 - open admission
 - limited admission
 - AC services
 - sanctuary
- Shelters have varying resources
 - monetary
 - space/facility
 - staff/time
 - volunteers



Before...



← There's the old dome!

...

After

No shelter program can be a "one size fits all" due to varying resources!

Playing for Life: Managing Dog Play Groups That Teach Social Skills and Increase Adoptions

Benefits of Play Groups

- **Determining Sociability**
 - Dog Parks, etc., are a way of life for many adopters
 - **Physical outlet, exercise & mental stimulation**
 - A 30 minute romp can be equivalent to a 2 hour walk!
 - Mental energy is burned through intensive social interaction.
 - **Natural environment for pack animals**
 - Pack-like bonding vs. social isolation can minimize behavioral deterioration.
 - Rapid behavior modification can be accomplished.
 - Best NOT to create mini-packs within one common territory
 - **Resources maximized**
 - Two people can attend to many more dogs in group then handling dogs individually = more outlet provided to the animals.
 - Time is always of the essence in rescue work! We average 80 dogs in 2.5 hours every morning (with the dogs getting at least 30 minutes of play time each!)
 - **Reduction of Barrier Aggression (BA) and On Leash Reactivity (OLR)**
 - Healthy contact can reduce perception of threat.
 - **Better room-mate matches**
 - after time to play together dogs generally cohabitate in kennels more smoothly
 - **Better adoption matches**
 - from all of their social experience while sheltered, many of our dog meets go more smoothly and we have comprehensive information about our shelter dogs' interactions with numerous other dogs.
- *** NOT a guarantee that territorial or resource guarding issues will not surface in the home! ***



Candidates for Play Groups

All ages, breeds, temperaments...

It depends upon the dog...

AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY...
the comfort level of the handler!!!



Creating Healthy Behavior

- **Puppies:**
 - learn best from appropriate adult dogs about bite inhibition and responsive play behavior
 - must be socialized with playful and/or tolerant dogs only...no un-socialized, fearful, defensive or offensive adults
 - can socialize with other puppies but must be monitored against developing bad habits



Behavior Modification

- For dog-dog issues, socially healthy dogs can be much more effective trainers than humans.
- The mental and physical outlet of play groups can create higher receptivity to training.
- What may be considered inappropriate play with a person can be natural between dogs.
- A pack can create the most natural environment for overcoming fear, anxiety and defensive aggression.
- Play groups can provide an enhanced quality of life for many sheltered dogs.



Understanding Play Styles

Gentle and Dainty:

- Very Mutual
- Relatively quiet
- Frequently starts & stops
- Easily becomes nervous with rough play



Rough and Rowdy:

- Mainly mutual
- Usually noisy
- Very physical
- Grabbing & Holding
- Chasing and tumbling
- Escalates & de-escalates
- Can trigger conflict



Push & Pull:



- Sometimes mutual
- Chasing, driving, heeling
- Can get noisy
- Can escalate & often ends in conflict
- Antagonistic to others

Seek and Destroy:

- Usually not mutual
- Rooted in prey drive
- Often noisy (growling and squealing)
- Can escalate
- Tends to need handler intervention
- Provocative to others



Compatible & Incompatible Play Styles

=

- Generally, same play styles do well together.
- Push & Pull's and Seek & Destroy's tend to do well together.
- Rough & Rowdy's LOVE to play together...if the handler is brave enough 😊



≠


- Rough & Rowdy's and Push & Pull's can be combustible.
- Gentle & Dainty's don't prefer to play with the other play styles.



Play Group Handling Techniques

- **Tone of Voice**
 - **Less is more**
use verbal when necessary...no jabbering!
 - **Low, not loud**
Use tones that exude confidence and control rather than reactivity
 - **Consistent negative marker**
Such as "eh-eh" or "enough"
- **Body Blocking**
 - **Legs, not hands!**
Communicate with the part of your body that is being affected
- **Collar Leads**
 - **Guide rather than Drag!**
No pressure on their collar if they are following

Remain calm!.....even when there is camper chaos 😊



Interruption

- The goal of interruption is to momentarily influence interaction.
- Behavior is inappropriate rather than concerning.
- Dog needs to develop different play habits.
- Only necessary if dogs are not responding to one another.
- REMEMBER – the goal is for the dogs to learn how to communicate with *each other!*













Correction

- The goal of correction is to extinguish behavior.
- Behavior is concerning and must not escalate.
- Dog needs to show increased responsiveness to handler while decreasing drive in play.



Tools and Applications Table

	Interruption	Correction	Single Dog	Multiple Dog
Spray Bottle				
Shake Can				
Direct Stop				
Air Horn				

Potential Side Effects of Tools

- **Shake Can (audible)**
 - ‘innocent dog’ is effected in addition to ‘offending’ dog
 - Fear of handler
- **Direct Stop**
 - Physical reaction to citronella
 - Fear of handler
- **Air Horn (BIG audible!)**
 - Effects all dogs
 - Physical reaction to extreme volume
 - Generalized fear of handler and/or play yard



Safety Tools Table

	Un-socialized	Fearful	Defensive	Offensive
Leash		 *		
Gentle Leader brand❖				
Muzzle				


















* **When fearful of the handler.**
 ❖ **For the potential suppression effect.**

Definitions of Social Status

<p>Un-socialized: overly aroused and/or reactive despite appropriate social gestures from others.</p> <p>Fearful: generally overwhelmed by environment, handlers and other dogs (with or without defense).</p> <p>Prey-like: fearful with immediate flight response, usually accompanied by high pitched vocalization.</p> <p>Defensive: doesn't initiate aggression but responds to challenge or bullying with aggression.</p> <p>Offensive: seeks out opportunities to aggress.</p>	<p>Playful: consistent gestures to initiate play. Quick to avoid and/or diffuse defensive or offensive aggression.</p> <p>Tolerant: passively avoids overt playful and/or antagonistic gestures.</p> <p>Dominant: confident with calm leadership qualities. Might appropriately correct obnoxious behavior. Might appropriately submit antagonistic behavior. Will effectively diffuse aggression. Will most likely ignore indifferent dogs and will play with appropriate dogs of either sex.</p>
--	---

Social Status Table

Best combinations for introductions:

	Opposite sex	Playful	Tolerant	Dominant
Un-socialized				
Fearful				
Prey-like				
Defensive				
Offensive				

What is Aggression?

Definitions to consider:

Aggression: An unprovoked attack. Aggressive action or practices.

Threat: A declaration of an intention to inflict injury or pain.

Warning: Admonition, advice, recommendation.

***Defense:** The act of defending or guarding.

***Offense:** The act of offending; a fault, sin or crime.

Communication: The exchange of ideas, conveyance of information.

Defense vs. Offense

**The behavior can look the same but is motivated differently,
 therefore, it should be handled differently.**

Precursors for a fight???

- **Pinned Ears** NO
- **Erect Tail** NO
- **Hackles**
 - **Shoulders (offense)** NO
 - **Full body (defense)** NO
- **Mounting** NO
 - **Dominant** NO
 - **Sexual** NO
- **Necking** NO
- **Growling**
- **Showing Teeth**



Dog Social Categories

(adapted from BAD RAP)

- **Dog Social** = appropriate and playful with other dogs on and off leash
- **Dog Tolerant** = usually more tolerant than playful or shows no interest; may be OLR
- **Dog Selective** = plays with some dogs while intolerant of others; most likely OLR
- **Dog Defensive** = playful with some dogs but reactive to dogs that challenge or dominate; most likely OLR
- **Dog Aggressive** = not able to play with or tolerate other dogs; probably OLR



Can we really predict?

- **BA and OLR behaviors**
 - are not necessarily indicators of dog aggression!!!
- **Successful Play Sessions**
 - are not a guarantee that a dog will be social with other dogs in the home.
 - dogs have personality conflicts, too
- **Shelter vs. Home**
 - is not necessarily contextual
- **Relationship**
 - can profoundly affect behavior and can not be scientifically measured
- **Resource Guarding (dog-dog)**
 - can escalate once home...or disappear
- **Territorial behaviors**
 - can emerge once home

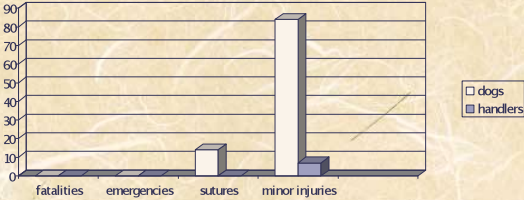



Risks Chart

“What good are we doing if we preserve their physical health at the expense of their mental health?”

De Fowler, Director of Operations

From 9/05-10/09 Monday-Sunday 15 dogs/group average



Injury Type	Dogs	Handlers
fatalities	0	0
emergencies	0	0
sutures	15	0
minor injuries	85	10

Minor Injuries: 1 concussion
 1 scratch to the face
 4 displaced bites while interrupting a fight
 1 cheap shot to the butt!

Canine Euthanasia Statistics

- LHS is an open-admission facility which has achieved a current **'Live Release Rate' for dogs of 92.5%** (compared to 78% in 2004...the year prior to the new Training & Behavior Program).
- Comparing 2004 to 2008 canine intakes increased by 324 dogs while 242 fewer dogs were euthanized = **a decrease in the canine euthanasia rate of 60%**.
- 2009 YTD (through September):
intake = 1512
euth = 107 = **7% canine euths**



Conclusion

- **We love doing play groups!**
 - the benefits outweigh the risks, by far!
- **More statistics, please!**
 - how many interactions?
 - breed, sex, intact or altered, social status, play style?
 - how many altercations needed interruption?
 - what injuries sustained?
- **Take what you can...**
 - be comfortable and confident in your application.
- **Enjoy letting dogs be dogs!**
 - watching the dogs play in groups makes our day!



Playing for Life: Managing Dog Play
Groups That Teach Social Skills and
Increase Adoptions



Longmont Humane
Society
9595 Nelson Rd.
Longmont, CO 80503
303-772-1232
www.longmonthumane.org

Aimee Sadler
Director of Training & Behavior
303-775-5491
aimee@longmonthumane.org
Professional IACP Member
#1449