

# **Humane Society of Sonoma Canine Care Volunteer Guidelines**

Last Updated 3/21/25

*The Humane Society of Sonoma County advocates a “Be Humane Train Without Pain” approach to all interactions with canines. Our philosophy advocates force-free and dog-friendly interactions using only positive reinforcement, science-based methods. HSSC does not condone the use of aversive training methods, defined as, “any circumstance or event that causes pain, fear, or emotional discomfort.” Balanced training methods, prong collars, electric collars, choke chains and flexi-leads are not permitted on the HSSC campus.*

*Canines in shelter experience a tremendous amount of stress, and our goal is to help reduce this unavoidable hardship by respecting their boundaries and advocating for their individual needs. While we understand that natural occurring canine behaviors are often an appropriate response to a particular stimulus, our Behavior and Training staff does offer behavior modification and reward-based training when suitable. Our HSSC Canine Care Volunteers are tasked with helping dogs reduce their stress by simply being present with them. We do not ask volunteers to teach dogs new behaviors, instead volunteers get to walk dogs, play with dogs and love dogs. This is the best way to help a shelter dog get adopted!*

## **People to contact for issues or concerns**

- The Behavior and Training (BnT) staff for any concerns with dogs or schedules.  
[bnt@humanesocietysoco.org](mailto:bnt@humanesocietysoco.org)
  - Clinic Admit Slips are located at the volunteer desk. Describe what you saw (i.e., “bloody diarrhea”, “limping on front right leg”, “discharge from nose”). Must be handed in person to a BnT Staff member (if you can’t find anyone, then hand to an ACT). Please do not disturb the Shelter Med Staff.
  - Report any incidents of a dog’s actions breaking skin. A bite incident report must be filled out immediately. Please don’t worry that the dog is “getting in trouble.”
  - Out and Abouts
  - Day Foster
- Nina Caputo for any general volunteer or Volgistics concerns-[ncaputo@humanesocietysoco.org](mailto:ncaputo@humanesocietysoco.org)
- Hillary for fostering (including overnight and weekend fostering)-  
[foster@humanesocietysoco.org](mailto:foster@humanesocietysoco.org)

## **Other Documents to Reference**

- Canine Care Volunteer Guideline Checklist.
- American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior (AVSAB) Position Statement on Humane Dog Training
- Hospital Dog Walking Procedures
- Out and Abouts

## **Videos to Watch**

Links to the following videos will be emailed to you. Please watch them for dog handling guidelines...

- ASPCA Dog Body Language

[https://aspc.zoom.us/recording/play/hm6Zn2JHeFvbJtxnpVAz6j736zO7pUPTctunrw8NvaERf\\_ZBPPIMd6zjrls4G6Et](https://aspc.zoom.us/recording/play/hm6Zn2JHeFvbJtxnpVAz6j736zO7pUPTctunrw8NvaERf_ZBPPIMd6zjrls4G6Et)

### **What to Wear**

- For your safety and protection please wear closed-toed shoes, long pants and short or long sleeves. Sandals, flip flops, shorts or skirts are not allowed.
- We always recommend covering your arms to prevent nail scratches. We have Kevlar sleeves available to borrow in the volunteer storage cabinet.
- Please always wear your name tag.

### **Phone Policy**

Please do not text or talk on the phone while walking dogs. But we always encourage you to take photos and videos of the dogs when it is safe to do so in play yards.

### **Radio Policy**

Please always carry a radio on you tuned to channel 12. Radios are a safety precaution and can be used in an emergency or a time of need. If you need help in any way, please radio BnT.

- Steps to use a radio:
  - Press the button that says “PTT” on the left side of the radio and hold for 1 second before speaking
  - Hold button while speaking clearly into the radio and state “\*your name\* to BnT”
  - Wait for the person to respond. If they don’t respond after 30 seconds, repeat the previous step
  - After the person responds, press and hold the “PTT” button and reply

### **Canine Care Volunteer Goals**

We sincerely appreciate your desire to provide a better life for the dogs until they find a permanent home. The goals of our Canine Care program are to provide enriching and positive experiences for the dogs while in a shelter environment. Canine Care Volunteers (CCV) play a predominant role in improving the general wellbeing of dogs by attending to their needs on a daily basis. Our volunteers participate in a wide variety of canine enrichment activities from play groups to scenting in addition to getting the dogs out of the habitats to stretch their legs, go potty and smell some fresh air. Our goal is to create an environment where the dogs suspect they are in a noisy, but fun doggie hotel with regular “activities” to participate in. If we can help dogs reduce the amount of stress they experience in a shelter setting and learn to bond with people, then we are well on the path toward helping them get into a home.

### **Positive Reinforcement Dog Training**

Please remember at the Humane Society of Sonoma County we strive to teach, promote, and practice positive reinforcement training techniques which we believe to be the only humane way of dog training. We do not condone “Alpha” or any dominance-based dog training philosophies, including “balanced” training. Therefore, prong collars, choke chains, flexi-leads, and choke chains are not allowed on campus. Our goal is to always follow LIMA (least invasive minimally aversive) and Fear Free handling protocols. At HSSC, dog training is firmly rooted in science, and we practice evidence-based protocols.

### **Working with Our Dogs**

Take some time to figure out what the dog with whom you are working with enjoys. Get to know them! Who are they? Spend some time observing their behavior in normal settings of walks, playgroups, and

other activities. Read your fellow volunteers' notes on this dog. Incorporate those activities with the dog in your care.

Not all dogs need to know sit. It does not necessarily increase the chance of their adoptions. Connection with people and toy play are stronger predictors of adoptability than blind obedience.

Calling the dog repeatedly teaches the dog to ignore his name and the handler (you). Again, it is your duty to keep your dog and you safe!

Remember, just because you say you are using positive reinforcement techniques, does not mean the dog is having a positive experience. Make sure they are having one by avoiding the use of "guessing" when working with the dog. Do not assume the dog is being stubborn or ignoring you when you ask for a behavior. Lure each behavior. They are shelter dogs, not owned dogs. Let the owners take that over. You need to make learning easy. If we make learning too hard, we increase the dog's level of stress. We already have a dog population under stress. Be nice. It is never appropriate to yell, physically punish, or give leash-pops (yank or pull on leash).

**Management:** Management is very much about selecting the right environment in which the dog can learn what you are trying to teach them. If we are constantly putting dogs too close to other dogs, they inadvertently can learn to ignore handlers. Keep your dog safe! Keep you safe! Examples: There are too many dogs in the upper yard and your dog is focusing on them, move away down the driveway. Be proactive about distracting the dogs from other dogs. Do not allow the dog to bark or lunge at other dogs. Do it before the dog is engaged in another dog. Move purposely and create space between you and the other dog.

**Attention on handler:** Please always focus on your dog. Make sure you are rewarding efforts from the dog to pay attention to you! If a dog is distracted (ex: another dog, feral cat, other people) you are likely too close to the distraction—create space and engage your dog by using your body movement, voice, or food lures to get his attention then reward with a treat, "good dog" or smile for the dog's efforts at attention.

**Jumping dogs:** Dogs have evolved to be hyper social beings, and jumping to get closer to a human is a natural dog behavior. Studies show that potential owners make a decision to adopt a dog within minutes of meeting the dog. Adopters are looking for a connection with the dog they are visiting. People want dogs to approach them quickly and if they jump up, it is often seen as the dog "picking" them to be their new parent. At HSC we do not "correct" a dog for jumping on a person. However, there are dogs that display arousal behavior by jumping and nipping. BnT will write a behavior modification plan to show the dog an alternative behavior. Please do not attempt to modify a dog's behavior without direction and approval from BnT.

**How to use a long-line:** A long-line is a leash (length can vary) that allows the dog to have freedom and distance from the handler. The line attaches to the back of a "Y" harness. Please do not attach to a flat collar. Long-lines are often used on dogs that are able to climb fences. Do not drop a long-line when using.

**Barrier and leash frustration:** If the dog is a known fence fighter, avoid the use of yards that will allow this behavior to happen. Using a long-line is a smart safety option. After you have control of the dog, engage them in a productive activity (fetch, find-it, treat catch, etc.) or behavior (sit, watch-me, touch) that can be rewarded. Please be aware that some dogs in a "heightened state of arousal" will "re-direct"

(jumping, mouthing, barking at handler, etc.) that energy back at the person on the other end of the leash.

**Rewards are reinforcement:** The principles that guide learning are universal across all species. At HSSC we use positive reinforcement dog training. Our goal is to reinforce the behavior we want our dog to repeat, and to not reinforce the behavior we don't want. The difficult part for humans is to identify, and then stop reinforcing the behavior we don't want.

Dogs repeat behavior because they are receiving reinforcement. If you reinforce a behavior, it's more likely to happen again. You get the behavior you reinforce. For example: rewarding a dog for having all four paws on the floor reinforces the dog to have all four paws on the floor instead of jumping on the handler.

When introducing new behaviors we use food as a reinforcer, because food is a primary motivator. When we want to create a hot spot (food always arrives at this position when they offer this behavior – if a dog is walking nicely by your side, offer them food with a flat hand at their mouth) we try to make an impression on our dogs by heavily reinforcing that position. We reward -reward -reward that behavior! Food as a motivator may fade, but reinforcement will never stop or the behavior will change.

What is a reward to a dog? A reward is something the dog finds reinforcing at that particular moment. It could be food, a ball, or just contact from you. Food is the universal reward, but not all dogs respond to food. They may be too excited or simply full and will not be interested in treats. If this is the case your job is to find out what is rewarding to that dog. It could be peeing on a bush, jumping in the pool, or chasing a ball; whatever it is the dog can learn valuable behaviors by working for the reinforcement.

#### **How to take a dog out:**

1. Please remember to clock-in to Volgistics before starting
2. Choose a dog appropriate to your color code from the dog walking board.
3. Open the dog's file in the volunteer computer and read all of the observations of the dog's behavior from staff and other walkers. Any red lettered information is posted by Behavior and Training and Shelter Med staff and is important to read and follow. When BnT reviews the notes, we may highlight trends. Please do not highlight the notes.
4. On the Dog Walking Board, sign out the dog you will be walking by writing your initials and the current time.
5. Before walking a dog, be sure you have:
  - a. A leash
    - i. We recommend bringing your own, but you can also borrow one from the BnT office. Leashes that can be borrowed are hanging on the wall outside of the BnT office.
    - ii. Use appropriately sized leash/clasp for the dog you are walking- smaller dogs are walked on lighter leashes
  - b. A treat bag and treats
    - i. If you need to borrow a treat bag, we have extras in the volunteer storage cabinet at the dog walking station.
    - ii. Be sure to check any diet restrictions on dogs prior to feeding them treats.
      1. There will be signs on the Dog Walking Board and the habitat door
  - c. Poop bags

- i. Poop bags are located on top of the volunteer storage cabinet
  - d. A radio
    - i. Radios are found in the BnT Office.
  - e. A key card
    - i. You can borrow one from the BnT Office. They are located directly inside the door. Please leave your car keys in the spot that you take a key card from so you don't forget to bring the key card back.
  - f. A golden key
    - i. Golden keys unlock habitat doors and are attached to the key card.
- 6. Entering a dog's habitat, interacting with the dog, leashing up a dog, and exiting a habitat with a dog:
  - a. If the dog's habitat is connected to a socialization room (Soc Room), enter through the door connected to the Soc Room.
  - b. The dog's equipment will be found hanging outside the dog's door or inside Soc. Room 3 on a bulletin board with the dog's name.
    - i. If the dog's equipment is not there, please do not take from another peg. Please report the missing equipment to the B&T office.
    - ii. MGs are always left on a dog (unless otherwise noted)
    - iii. Harnesses can and should be left on dogs ONLY IF NOTED. Do not leave equipment on a dog unless BnT makes a request on the DW white board.
  - c. Know where the dog is prior to opening the door. Slowly open the door, enter the door at an angle, and use your body to block the exit.
    - i. Sleeping dog protocol
      - 1. Dogs typically get about 15 hours of sleep a day and get significantly less in the shelter. When they are sleeping, we want to allow them that rest.
      - 2. If the dog is sleeping, do not disturb them. Sign out another dog to walk (without erasing your initials and time from the sleeping dog's slot) and take out the next dog on a walk.
      - 3. After walking the next dog, return to the sleeping dog to see if they are awake.
        - a. If they are awake, take them for a walk!
        - b. If they are still asleep, repeat this process until the dog is awake.
        - c. If the dog does not wake up by the end of your shift, erase your initials and time from their spot on the walking board.
  - d. Feed food to dogs from a flat hand at an appropriate height for the dog so the dog doesn't have to jump to reach it. Place your flat hand below their chin. Low and slow.
  - e. Co-housed dogs: Ask another volunteer to help you if you're taking them for a walk
  - f. Shy dog Protocol:
    - i. Don't look at them directly at their face or in their eyes
    - ii. Toss a treat to the other edge of the habitat and lower yourself down into a squat with your side facing them
    - iii. Do not lean over the dog and attempt to reach out and grab them.
    - iv. Let the dog come to you. Some dogs need the time to warm up.
    - v. Spend some time in the habitat sitting with the dog and talking to them
    - vi. Use the 3-second rule- pet dog gently and calmly for 3 seconds on their chest then move hand away. If the dog stays close, the dog is okay with being pet
  - g. Rambunctious dogs:



- i. Please place a cone outside of the gate.
    - ii. And, raise the cone above the gate.
    - ii. Dummy lock the gate to prevent dogs from opening the latch.
  - b. Lower yards are good for dogs that are not reactive.
    - i. If one of the lower yards is occupied, ask permission to enter the other yard- the main issue is dog compatibility.
    - ii. Please raise a cone above the gate.
  - c. The Upper yard is good for reactive dogs and dogs that need more room to run.
    - i. Please place a cone outside of the gate.
    - ii. And, raise a cone above the gate.
  - d. The Old Agility yard may be used with permission from BnT.
    - i. Dogs need to be on a longline in the Old Agility yard.
  - e. Courtyard Protocols
    - i. Reserve the space by radioing "Attention Staff Dog in the Courtyard."
    - ii. Move the three orange cones outside the three doors.
    - iii. Make sure the three gates are latched.
    - iv. Bring the dog into the Courtyard.
    - v. Return the dog to their room.
    - vi. Pick up toys and poop from the courtyard, place the cones inside the courtyard.
    - vii. Clear the courtyard by radioing "Attention Staff Courtyard Clear."
  - f. When in the yards, do not allow your dog to stand at the fence or stare at another dog on the other side of the fence. This can encourage barrier reactivity or frustration.
  - g. Please do not rough house/wrestle with the dog.
  - h. Use the pooper scooper to pick up poop.
  - i. Pick up all toys and return them to the toy basket before leaving. The next dog entering may decide to eat the toys.
  - j. Attach drag/long line to dogs that are potential flight risks. Some dogs may climb/jump the fence or even slip through cracks in the fence.
- 11. Interacting with the public
  - a. Be the dog's advocate and do not allow people to come up to the dog.
  - b. Unless you have been instructed to help with an introduction, please do not introduce dogs to the public for everyone's safety.
  - c. If a member of the public asks you about a dog you are walking you can tell them the dog's name and if they're available for adoption. Please tell them to call the adoptions desk to find out more information about the dog.
- 12. Returning the dog to the habitat
  - a. Walk the dog into the habitat, close the door behind you and spend some time with them before leaving, unless otherwise noted.
  - b. Return the dog's equipment to the location at which you found it.
  - c. Mark any elimination of feces or urine on the observation card located on the habitat door.
- 13. Cleaning habitats
  - a. If there is urine or feces in the habitat, clean it up.
  - b. Cleaning supplies are by the sink in the socialization rooms. Soak up the urine with the towels and scoop the feces with the scoopers (outside the Socialization Room doors) or a bag.
  - c. Deposit dirty towels in the hamper and feces in the pails provided (outside the Soc. Room door).

- d. Spray the soiled area with Oxiver spray and dry it.
- e. If the dog's blankets are dirty, deposit them in the hamper and replace them with clean ones.
- f. Refill empty water bowls.

14. Dog Walker Notes

- a. After the walk/visit, please write notes about the dog in their files on the computers at the dog walker station.
- b. Open the folder "Dog Walker Notes" and locate the file with the dog's name.
- c. Include your first name, last initial, and date in the column on the left.
- d. Write what activity/activities you did in the column in the middle.
- e. Describe the behavior(s) you saw observed in the column on the right. Please use objective language when possible.
- f. *You do not need to note pee and poop in the dog walking notes. Mark their eliminations in their tracking chart.*
- g. **Any medical concerns should be reported to BnT on a Medical Admit slip.**

**Enrichment activities**

- The HSSC Canine Program not only advocates for the humane treatment of dogs in our care, but we also strive to create opportunities for them to engage in fun and enriching activities that help reduce their stress. Listed below are some of the ways that volunteers can provide enrichment on campus:
  - Weekly play groups run by an experienced volunteer.
  - K9X - a Canine Exploratorium experience with puzzles, chewies, toys or just a nap.
  - Scenting for Shelter Dogs is a weekly class that can be run by volunteers.
  - Take a dog to a four week Public Training class.
  - Provide habitat enrichment with food puzzles, frozen treats, enrichment boxes, snuffle or licky mats.
- Off campus adventures are also possible:
  - Out and Abouts happen when dogs go off campus with volunteers either in a group or for a solo adventure.
  - Day Foster is when volunteers take dogs home for the day. This may include a walk or outing or just taking a nap. Day Fosters do not need to go through Foster Training unless the dog is staying overnight.
  - Taking a dog for a run.

**Puppy Handling Protocols**

Volunteers must wear gowns, booties and gloves to visit with puppies in order to protect the puppies and prevent the spread of disease. Puppies do not have mature immune systems. Additionally, the puppies may be harboring an illness and are not showing symptoms yet. Following the protocol will reduce the risk of bringing any illness back to their own animals. PPE will be provided in a "Puppy Protocol" bin outside of the puppies' room. It is strongly recommended that those interacting with puppies wash hands and change clothes upon arriving home.

**Kennel Cough Protocols**

Kennel cough is a name we give a disease complex caused by a variety of viruses and bacteria. Typically, this disease spreads in crowded conditions where animal share a common space and are able to breathe in the infectious agents directly. Dog walkers need to visit with these animals last, wash their hands, and change their clothes upon arriving home. By taking these precautions, you will lessen the chance of



exposure to resident dogs. These are the same recommendations we would make for them visiting with any of our animals. It is recommended resident animals be fully vaccinated.

### **Dog Walker Colors**

Dogs are color coded in accordance of level of difficulty they are to walk. The Behavior and Training department makes these decisions based off of observations.

- Blue- moderately difficult in some areas:
  - May be mouthy /take treats roughly
  - Jumps on people
  - High energy
  - Large & Rambunctious; manageable
  - Easily Distracted by dogs
  - Worried/ about people/ environment
  - Won't take treats
- Blue 2- Difficult in many areas or significant issues with people or dogs:
  - Leash Frustration/Aggression
  - Very difficult for handler to enter /exit habitat
  - Difficult to harness /leash
  - Fearful of people / environment
  - Large & Rambunctious
  - Mouthy
- Red – Very difficult in any of the areas below
  - Extreme fear of people/environment/dogs
  - Aggressive with dogs
  - Severe Leash/Barrier Aggression
  - Rambunctious to the point of being dangerous
  - Unable to enter /exit habitat
  - Mouthy

### **“The Watch Board”**

“The Watch Board” is a white board that lists the final disposition of animals at the shelter. Final dispositions include humane euthanasia (HE) for both medical and behavioral reasons. The Watch Board is located in the hallway next to the Dog Walking Board on the other side of the Intake office. The Watch Board is located here to allow people to look if they would like to know, and avoid it if they would rather not know the final disposition of an animal. The Watch Board also includes a “spoil date” for animals, which is a day of giving the animal every treat imaginable (for example, this can include hamburgers) and the date of the final disposition. If you have any questions about The Watch Board, please see a BnT staff member.