## Behavior Treatment Eligibility Introduction

## What is the Treatment Eligibility Chart and Why Do We Have It?

The Treatment Eligibility Chart (TEC) is the organization-wide guide for making judicious, expedient decisions for dogs who exhibit concerning behavior.

The purpose of the TEC is to ensure that we are dedicating our limited resources to dogs who are safe to treat and have the best prognoses for becoming safe, happy companion pets.

For organizations with multiple shelters, it is appropriate that a dog arriving at one facility is assured the same opportunities for behavior treatment as a dog in another facility, so these guidelines serve to achieve consistency across the organization. If a dog is deemed eligible for treatment but the facility where the dog is located does not have the resources to provide it, behavior staff may request that the dog be transferred to another facility where it can receive the appropriate behavioral care.

## How to Use these Documents

If you determine that the dog is exhibiting a problem behavior, refer to the TEC. The TEC provides a framework for deciding whether the dog should:

* be adopted as is
* receive management/exercise/enhanced enrichment while awaiting adoption
* go to a foster home and be adopted from there
* receive behavior treatment/training
* be humanely euthanized

The TEC lists commonly reported problem behaviors in sheltered dogs, along with their severity or risk, and most likely course of action. Definitions of problem behaviors are provided below the chart.

The chart categorizes problem behaviors by fear, arousal, aggression, and miscellaneous.

* Refer to the standardized Fear Scale and Arousal Scale to determine the severity of fear and arousal, respectively.
* Refer to the Risk Assessment Tool to determine the risk of aggressive behavior.

The TEC is also supported by Treatment Considerations – What You Should Know & Requirements for Successful Treatment for dogs exhibiting fear, arousal, and aggression.

As the dog progresses through treatment, behavior teams should use the Behavior Adoptability Guidelines as the ultimate benchmark for determining when the dog is ready to move forward for adoption. If the dog is consistently not meeting interim treatment benchmarks, the dog’s quality of life is unacceptably poor, or additional behavior concerns arise, it is recommended that you adjust the animal’s behavior support plan, or the integrated pathway planning team may determine that the dog is no longer appropriate for treatment and may be humanely euthanized.

## Exceptions, Caveats, and Grey Areas

Use the TEC as a guide to facilitate discussions about animals that either present with a problem behavior at intake or that exhibit a problem behavior during their stay. The TEC is not a black-and-white decision-making tool. Behavior teams should consider alternative pathway options when appropriate for individual animals, except for humane euthanasia recommendations where there are public safety issues or quality of life concerns.

While the TEC includes the most common problem behaviors, it cannot encompass everything. When something emerges that is not addressed, it is up to staff behavior experts to determine if they have the expertise and resources to treat.

For simplicity, problem behaviors in the TEC are presented as though the dog has a single issue. Dogs may present with multiple concerns, and it is up to staff behavior experts to consider whether the dog’s prognosis is still good enough to justify treatment.

## Psychoactive Medication as Adjunct Therapy

If the behavior team believes the dog would benefit from psychoactive medication to complement behavior modification, discuss it with the medical / veterinary team. In conjunction, develop a plan for monitoring the efficacy of the medication and for adjusting drugs or dosages as warranted (adhering to your organization’s position on the use of psychopharmacology).

## Summary

Staff behavior teams should use the TEC to facilitate discussion when making decisions about whether a dog is eligible for behavior treatment, to assess risk, and to explore other interventions and pathways that may be appropriate (e.g., enhanced enrichment, foster care). Determining a dog’s status is an ongoing, dynamic process. We recognize there will sometimes be gray areas and rely on the expertise of the behavior teams to navigate through more complex cases.

**Behavior Treatment Eligibility Considerations**

To be a practical candidate for treatment, the dog must be responsive to at least one incentive for motivating behavior change, such as dog-dog interaction, play, food, physical pressure or other aversive stimuli (adhering to your organization’s philosophy on training and behavior modification methods).

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| --- |
| **Fearful Dogs** |
| What You Should Know:   * Most mildly fearful dogs may meet Adoptability Guidelines without treatment * Dogs with medical concerns who require frequent handling that would routinely put them over threshold may not be appropriate for treatment * Anecdotally, we believe that dogs who are social with other dogs have a better prognosis, provided helper dogs are used in treatment * Anecdotally, we believe that fearful dogs have a better prognosis if they show some social behavior toward people * Dogs displaying moderate to severe fear have a better prognosis if they have easy access to quiet, low-trafficked working and walking areas   Requirements for Successful Treatment:   * If relying on food incentive, the ability to control the delivery of daily food rations and/or use of high value treats * If relying on helper dogs, access to a pool of human/dog friendly helper dogs * Ability to provide housing with controlled human activity * Hiding spots (e.g., crate, crate bottom, behind visual barrier) * Rolling crates, chutes, transfer or shift kennels, etc. so dogs can be moved or managed without leashing or handling, if needed |
| **Aroused Dogs** |
| What You Should Know:   * Most dogs with mild arousal may meet Adoptability Guidelines without treatment * Specifically, the shelter environment may trigger some dogs’ arousal and these dogs should be prioritized for alternative housing, such as foster or board & train * If an aroused dog redirects aggression to people or other dogs, complete a risk assessment to assess eligibility for treatment * The more situations in which the dog becomes aroused, the more extensive the treatment program will need to be * We suspect that moderately to severely aroused dogs who show social behavior toward people have a better prognosis   Requirements for Successful Treatment:   * Dogs displaying severe arousal may require protected contact treatment and/or be handled by staff proficient in defensive handling * Dogs displaying severe arousal should only be treated if unsafe behaviors can be consistently and effectively managed * Proficient behavior experts to conduct behavior modification; experienced in the use of aversive incentives * If arousal occurs in playgroup, access to a pool of dog-social, resilient helper dogs |
| **Aggressive Dogs** |
| *Dogs showing aggressive behavior may require a Risk Assessment to determine eligibility for treatment.*  What You Should Know:   * An adult dog with a recent onset of aggression may be more amenable to modification than an adult dog with an extensive history of aggression * If it can be done safely, consider board & train assessment/treatment for dogs who show aggression that is suspected to be shelter-specific * Dogs with medical concerns who require frequent handling that would routinely put them over threshold may not be appropriate for treatment   Requirements for Successful Treatment:   * Proficient behavior experts to conduct behavior modification * Skilled handlers to care for and handle the dog * Management options to mitigate or prevent aggression when skilled handlers are unavailable * If the aggression is directed toward dogs, access to a pool of dog-social, resilient helper dogs and behavior experts skilled in the use of aversive incentives |

**Canine Behavior Treatment Eligibility Chart**

Refer to the end of the document for definitions of the Problem Behaviors.

## KEY (for most likely intervention of choice)

Place = Placement (e.g., Adoption, Transfer)

Treat = In-shelter Behavioral Treatment (e.g., training, behavior modification)

Foster = Foster Care for behavioral treatment or adoption from foster care; Foster-to-Adopt

HE = Humane Euthanasia

To determine Mild, Moderate, or Severe: refer to Fear Scale and Arousal Scale

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Problem Behavior** | **Mild** | **Moderate** | **Severe** |
| Fear of People |  |  |  |
| Fear of Handling |  |  |  |
| Fear of Leashing, Leash Pressure, Walking on Leash |  |  |  |
| Fear of Places, Objects, Novelty |  |  |  |
| Fear of Noises |  |  |  |
| Fear of Dogs |  |  |  |
| Arousal Toward People/Dogs  (Specific to Kennel) |  |  |  |
| Arousal in Kennel/Shelter Stress |  |  |  |
| Arousal Out of Kennel/Jumping & Mouthing |  |  |  |
| Arousal on Leash (People) |  |  |  |
| Arousal on Leash (Dogs/Moving Things) |  |  |  |
| Arousal during Play with Dogs |  |  |  |
| Nuisance Barking |  |  |  |
| Separation Anxiety |  |  |  |
| House Soiling |  |  |  |
| Repetitive Behavior |  |  |  |

## Behaviors that Require an Assessment of Risk

To aid in determining risk, consider the factors outlined in the Risk Assessment.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Problem Behavior** | **Low** | **Medium** | **High/Extreme** |
| Aggression Toward People – Defensive |  |  |  |
| Aggression Toward People – Offensive |  |  |  |
| Aggression Toward Unfamiliar People |  |  |  |
| Aggression toward Children |  |  |  |
| Aggression toward Elderly, Disabled People |  |  |  |
| Aggression When Handled |  |  |  |
| Redirected Aggression toward People |  |  |  |
| Aggression Toward Dogs – Defensive |  |  |  |
| Aggression Toward Dogs – Offensive |  |  |  |
| Aggression Toward Unfamiliar Dogs |  |  |  |
| Resource Guarding |  |  |  |
| Predatory Behavior toward people or dogs |  |  |  |
| Predatory Behavior toward other species |  |  |  |

Color Legend:

Fear Aggression

Arousal Other

## Definitions of Problem Behaviors

Fear of People: fear when a person approaches, is in proximity, becomes visible, or interacts with the dog

*Behaviors may include watching a person from a distance, hesitating on approach, avoiding or conflicted approaching and avoiding, leaning, or pulling away, trembling,* *startling, or flinching, pacing and/or becoming immobile. Examples of severe fear include fleeing, persistently seeking an escape, becoming catatonic, losing control of the bladder or bowels, and expressing the anal glands.*

Fear of Handling: fear when a person reaches toward, touches, pets, restrains, or otherwise handles the dog’s body in non-sensitive (e.g., chest, shoulders, neck) and/or sensitive areas (e.g., paws, ears, tail)

*Behaviors may include leaning or pulling away, trembling,* *startling, flinching and/or becoming immobile. Examples of severe fear include fleeing, persistently seeking an escape, catatonia, losing control of bladder, bowels or expressing anal glands.*

Fear of Leashing, Leash Pressure, Walking On-Leash: mild hesitation, brief freezing, trembling, approach and/or avoidance, pacing or fleeing during leashing and/or during walks on-leash

*When on leash, the dog may hesitate, pull, dart, balk, crawl along the ground, become immobile, flee, “gator roll,” lose control of the bladder/bowels and/or express the anal glands. The dog may become more fearful when the leash tightens.*

Fear of Places, Objects, Novelty: fear when in unfamiliar environments, when encountering novel objects or new experiences

*Behaviors may include hesitating, cautious, or slow movement, briefly exploring, trembling, pacing, immobility, trying to hide, tries to escape, catatonia, losing control of the bladder/bowels and/or expressing the anal glands. The dog may hide behind or stay in physical contact with a familiar person or dog. The dog may use the person or dog as a secure base to explore the environment or investigate an object.*

Fear of Noises: fear of sounds, such as thunderstorms, fireworks, alarms, sudden loud noises, etc.

*Behaviors may include panting, whining, salivating, hiding, trembling, avoiding objects or areas and/or trying to escape. Examples of severe fear include frantic, persistent attempts to hide or escape, often to the point of injury.*

Fear of Dogs: fear of other dogs without aggression

*Behaviors may include watching another dog from a distance, hesitating on approach, avoidance or conflicted approach and avoidance, leaning or pulling away, trembling, startling or flinching, pacing and/or becoming immobile. Examples of severe fear include fleeing, persistently seeking an escape, catatonia, losing control of the bladder/bowels and expressing the anal glands.*

Arousal Toward People/Dogs (Specific to Kennel): barking, charging, lunging and/or growling at people and/or dogs when in a kennel

*Dog is immediately and consistently friendly, neutral, or mildly fearful with people/dogs when the kennel door opens and outside of the kennel. This problem appears to be specific to the shelter situation. Examples of severe may include suffering from exhaustion, heat stress, illness from fatigue, repeatedly harming itself, persistently on alert, bites bars or bites anything inserted into kennel, poor QoL.*

Arousal in Kennel/Shelter Stress: spinning, circling, pacing, barking, jumping, etc. that occurs when in a kennel

*Behaviors are often accompanied by heavy panting and an inability to rest. The dog may engage in self-injurious behavior, such as bar or metal bowl biting. Behaviors are triggered by specific stimuli, such as people or dogs walking by, meal or play times, etc., and appear specific to the shelter environment. Examples of severe may include suffering from exhaustion, heat stress, illness from fatigue, repeatedly harming itself, poor QoL.*

Arousal Out of Kennel/Jumping, Mouthing: pulling or jumping up wildly, leaping on things, grabbing objects, tearing clothing, mounting and/or jumping on people, mouthing people, etc.

*Examples of severe may include grabbing objects or people and refusing to let go and/or shaking them, jumping up to make contact with faces, and mouthing hard enough to cause injury. Behaviors may or may not be specific to the shelter environment.*

Arousal On-Leash (People): barking and pulling or lunging toward people only while leashed

*The dog may be stationary or moving. In all other circumstances, the dog is consistently friendly, neutral, or mildly fearful toward people. Behaviors may or may not be specific to the shelter environment. Examples of severe may include uninterruptable, uncontrollable, lunges to the extent of falling over backward, pulls handler down, bites or tries to bite the person, inability to calm after person disappears, reacts from a great distance.*

Arousal On-Leash (Dogs/Moving Things): barking and pulling or lunging toward dogs and/or things with wheels, such as scooters, strollers, bicycles, and skateboards, while leashed

*The dog may be stationary or moving. In all other circumstances, the dog is consistently friendly, neutral, or mildly fearful toward dogs and people. Behaviors may or may not be specific to the shelter environment. Examples of severe may include uninterruptable, uncontrollable, lunges to the extent of falling over backward, pulls handler down, bites or tries to bite the target, inability to calm after the dog or moving thing disappears, reacts from a great distance.*

Arousal During Play with Dogs: rambunctious, intense play with other dogs, often escalating the longer the play session

*Behaviors include rough-and-tumble, vertical boxing and/or chase play. Examples of mild may include rough-and-tumble play that becomes increasingly rough with compatible partners, but the dog modulates its behavior depending upon the reactions of other dogs and responds appropriately to human or dog corrections. Examples of moderate may include persistent rough-and-tumble play with dogs that try to avoid them; relentless chase in which the dog delivers occasional inhibited bites to the dog being chased; however, the dog can be interrupted by humans during play and, even without interruption, will lose interest in unwilling playmates. Examples of severe may include persistent rough-and-tumble play to the degree that other dogs respond defensively; relentless chase in which the dog delivers bites that cause pain or injury, grabbing and holding other dogs’ collars or skin without immediate release; the dog is not responsive to being interrupted by humans or to corrections from other dogs.*

Nuisance Barking: a very low threshold for barking; the barking is not believed to be specific to the shelter environment

*The dog barks when excited, barks when stimulated by sights and sounds in the environment, barks for attention, barks for no apparent reason, etc. Examples of severe may include uninterruptable and pervasive, persistently on alert.*

Separation Anxiety: distress when left alone, either when isolated from people or from a specific person

*Behaviors may include barking, howling, house soiling, panting, repetitive movement, anorexia (only when alone), destruction and/or escaping. Examples of severe may include harms itself in attempts to escape, can’t be contained, excessive destruction, incessant barking/howling, separation-induced diarrhea, repetitive behavior to the point of injury or illness, poor QoL.*

Chronic House Soiling: persistently eliminating indoors, despite housetraining efforts

*The dog may eliminate both indoors and outdoors or refuse to eliminate outdoors altogether. Examples of severe may include so persistent indoors that dog must spend most of its time in a crate or outdoors and, as a result, poor QoL (because doesn’t want to be isolated), refuses to wear a diaper, can’t be contained, soils even in restricted confinement.*

Repetitive Behavior: repetitive behavior that occurs out of the kennel context

*Examples include flank sucking, shadow chasing, excessive grooming, spinning/pacing in circles, etc. It may be classified as severe if the behavior appears unrelated to any obvious trigger and interferes with basic functioning to such a degree that the animal suffers a poor QoL. Severe may also include behaviors that cause physical injury to the animal.*

## Problem Behaviors that Require a Risk Assessment

***Offensive vs. Defensive Aggression Risk***

With limited exception, only low or medium risk aggression cases are placeable or treatable. Aggression is defined as threat or damage to another individual, human or animal; aggressive behavior may be displayed along a continuum, from threats (i.e., growls, hisses, tooth displays) to bites, and can result in physical and psychological harm.

Offensive aggression is almost always rated as high or extreme risk and generally not eligible for treatment or placement; it is inherently of greater risk than defensive aggression and its treatment prognosis is poor. Offensive aggressive is defined as aggressive behavior that is accompanied by confident or assertive body language; may occur in conjunction with other indications of confidence, such as upright posture, charging forward, low-pitched barking, etc.; if the animal bites, bites are likely to be hard and deep.

Defensive aggression also has a guarded prognosis. Defensive aggressive behavior is defined as aggressive behavior that is accompanied by fearful body language; may occur in conjunction with other indications of fear, such as attempting to escape, high-pitched barking, etc. However, the animal may stay in place or charge forward, while still showing fearful behavior; if the animal bites, bites are likely to be quick and shallow. Defensive aggression may be rated as high or extreme risk if, for example, the damage caused is significant, the aggression is not predictable, the dog is large, bites target the face, the dog charges forward to bite, aggression cannot be safely interrupted by behavior staff, aggression persists after the trigger is removed from the environment or the dog reacts from a great distance. Dogs that inflict level IV or greater bites have a poor prognosis.

Aggression toward People – Defensive: aggression toward people while showing signs of fear; dog retreats from the person, stays stationary, or moves toward the person

*Defining characteristics include fearful body language (lowered body, ears flat or laid back, low or tucked tail, averted gaze and/or wide eyes, weight shifted away from the target). If the dog threatens, the commissure tends to be pulled back so that all the teeth are exposed (a fear grimace). If the dog barks, the bark may be high-pitched. If the dog bites, the bites tend to be rapid and shallow, followed by retreat. Even though the aggression is defensive, the prognosis is guarded for medium/high-risk cases because as the dog becomes less fearful and more confident, the aggression toward people can become increasingly offensive.*

Aggression toward People – Offensive: aggression toward people while displaying signs of confidence or, assertiveness

*Defining characteristics include confident body language (heightened stature, ears forward, tail raised and stiff or flagging, direct gaze, weight shifted toward the target) and tries to decrease the distance to the target whenever possible. If the dog threatens, the commissure tends to be pulled forward so that only the canines and incisors are exposed (an aggressive pucker). If the dog vocalizes, the bark or growl will likely be low-pitched. If the dog bites, the bites are more likely to be hard and deep.*

Aggression toward Unfamiliar People: aggression toward unfamiliar people only

*The dog shows no signs of aggression toward familiar people. Repeated, gradual exposure results in the dog ceasing to show aggression toward a specific person—and, once the person becomes familiar, the dog is highly social. There is some reason to believe that dogs displaying this problem behavior are likely to worsen in a home environment. This may mean that it takes longer and requires more effort for a person to become familiar to the dog, that the aggressive behavior toward unfamiliar people becomes more severe, or both. Prognosis is guarded to poor.*

Aggression toward Children: aggression directed specifically toward children

*The dog may feel threatened by the novel appearance, movements, and noise of children. Some dogs will only react to children who are running, screaming, or approaching them directly, while other dogs react to children regardless of their behavior. Children are at the highest risk of serious bites from dogs. It is extremely challenging and very risky to manage a dog that is aggressive toward children. It is impossible to avoid children altogether, and children are not necessarily responsive to requests to stay away from the dog. It is completely infeasible in a shelter environment to try to change the aggressive dog’s behavior toward children. The prognosis is poor.*

Aggression toward Elderly or Disabled People: aggression directed specifically toward vulnerable elderly or disabled people

*The dog may feel threatened by unusual appearances, slow or erratic movements (also may be accompanied by canes, walkers, etc.), or strange speech patterns. Elderly people are at high risk of significant injury from dog bites because their skin and bones are more fragile, and they are prone to falling. Provided that the dog is not living in a home with elderly or a disabled person, it is reasonable to manage such a dog. If encountered, most of these people are likely to be responsive to requests to stay away from the dog.*

Aggression When Handled: aggression when a person reaches toward, touches, pets, restrains, or otherwise handles the dog’s body

*The contact may be in non-sensitive (e.g., chest, shoulders, neck) or sensitive areas (e.g., paws, ears, tail). The prognosis is best for dogs that enjoy pleasant handling and react only when people touch certain areas that may have been previously associated with unpleasant or painful experiences/conditions, such as ear infections, nail trims and medical procedures.*

Redirected Aggression toward People: aggression caused by arousal or frustration, triggered by something in the environment

*The dog initially focuses on the source of arousal or frustration but then turns and directs aggression toward the handler’s body. The dog is often restrained on a leash, behind a barrier, or otherwise thwarted from accessing the triggering stimulus.*

Aggression toward Dogs – Defensive: aggression toward dogs while showing signs of fear

*Defining characteristics include fearful body language (lowered body, ears flat or laid back, low or tucked tail, averted gaze and/or wide eyes, weight shifted away from the target). If the dog threatens, the commissure tends to be pulled back so that all the teeth are exposed (a fear grimace). If the dog barks, the bark may be high-pitched. If the dog bites, the bites tend to be rapid and shallow, followed by retreat.*

Aggression toward Dogs – Offensive: aggression toward other dogs while showing signs of confidence, assertiveness, or anger

*Defining characteristics include confident body language (heightened stature, ears forward, tail raised and stiff or flagging, direct gaze, weight shifted toward the target) and tries to decrease the distance to the target whenever possible. If the dog threatens, the commissure tends to be pulled forward back so that only the canines and incisors are exposed (an aggressive pucker). If the dog vocalizes, the bark or growl is likely to be low-pitched. If the dog bites, the bites are more likely to be hard and deep.*

Aggression toward Unfamiliar Dogs: aggression toward unfamiliar dogs only

*The dog opts to avoid unfamiliar dogs whenever possible. Shows no signs of aggression toward familiar dogs. Repeated or gradual exposure results in the dog ceasing to show aggression toward a specific dog—and, once the dog becomes familiar, the dog is highly social.*

Resource Guarding: aggression when a dog perceives that a person or animal is competing for something that they have or want

*The dog may guard food, chew items, stolen items, toys, beds, crates and/or companions. The more items the dog is likely to guard, the higher the risk and the more difficult the problem is to change, simply because of the number of triggering stimuli that must be incorporated into a treatment program. In more severe cases, the dog may guard items that are not in proximity, making treatment and management challenging.*

Predatory Behavior toward People or Dogs: behaviors specific to the eye-stalk-chase-grab-bite sequence specifically triggered by prey-like behaviors (i.e., high-pitched vocalizations, quick movements, rapid retreat)

*Low-risk predatory behavior might include movement-controlling behaviors by herding breeds (circling, chasing, and gentle nipping).*

Predatory Behavior toward Other Animals: same as above, only directed toward prey, livestock, or household pets that are not dogs