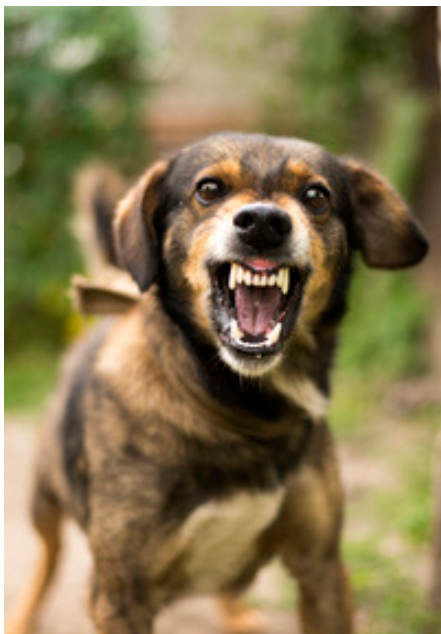




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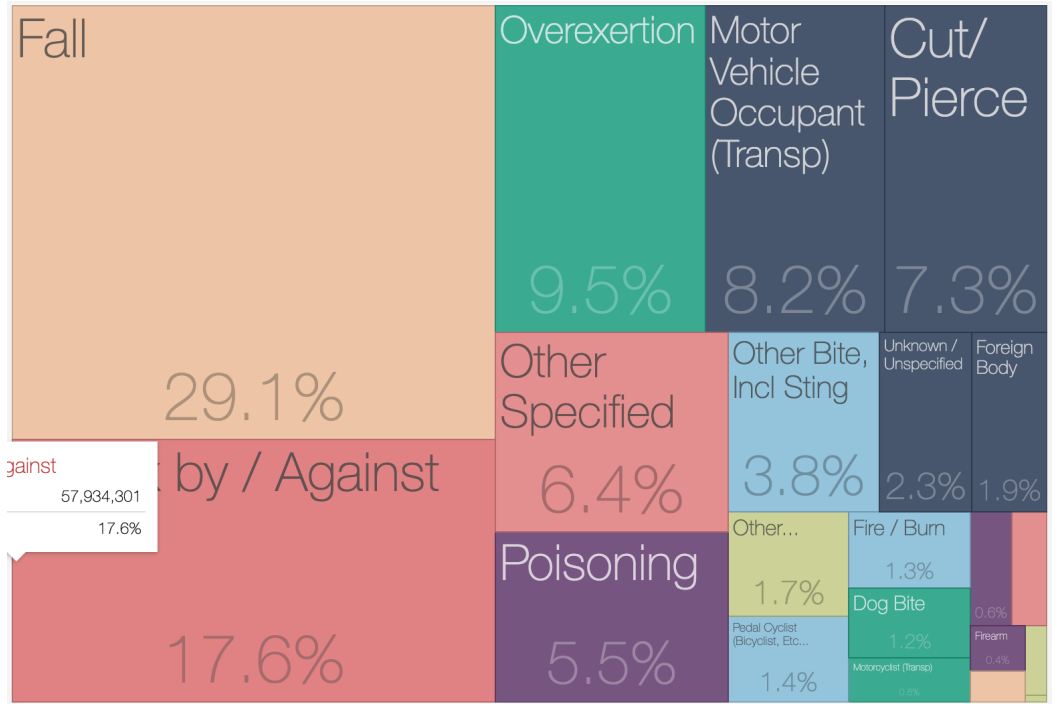
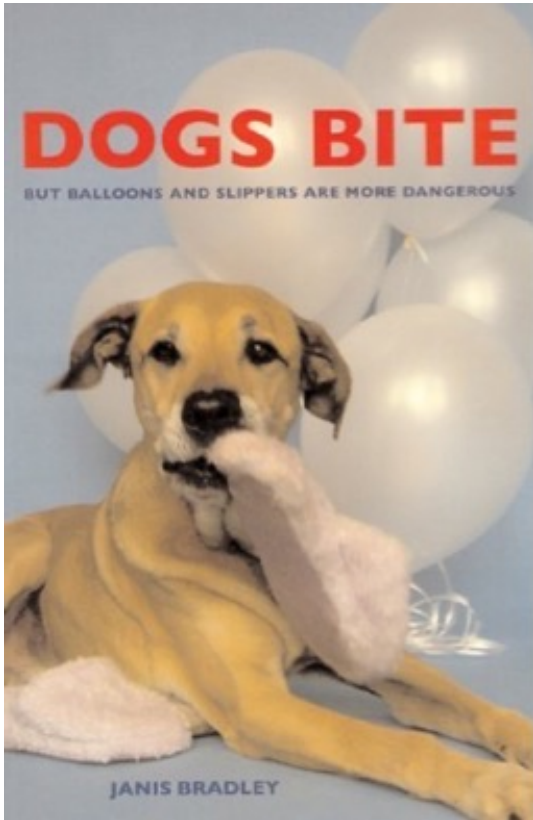
# Shelter Intake: Assessing Dogs with Bite Histories

Dr. Sheila Segurson, DACVB  
Director of Community Solutions  
Maddie's Fund



**Risk**





Wisqars.cdc.gov



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## Dr. Ian Dunbar's Dog Bite Scale (Official Authorized Version)

### An assessment of the severity of biting problems based on an objective evaluation of wound pathology

**Level 1.** Obnoxious or aggressive behavior but no skin-contact by teeth.

**Level 2.** Skin-contact by teeth but no skin-puncture. However, may be skin nicks (less than one tenth of an inch deep) and slight bleeding caused by forward or lateral movement of teeth against skin, but no vertical punctures.

**Level 3.** One to four punctures from a single bite with no puncture deeper than half the length of the dog's canine teeth. Maybe lacerations in a single direction, caused by victim pulling hand away, owner pulling dog away, or gravity (little dog jumps, bites and drops to floor).

**Level 4.** One to four punctures from a single bite with at least one puncture deeper than half the length of the dog's canine teeth. May also have deep bruising around the wound (dog held on for N seconds and bore down) or lacerations in both directions (dog held on and shook its head from side to side).

**Level 5.** Multiple-bite incident with at least two Level 4 bites or multiple-attack incident with at least one Level 4 bite in each.

**Level 6.** Victim dead.



The above list concerns unpleasant behavior and so, to add perspective:

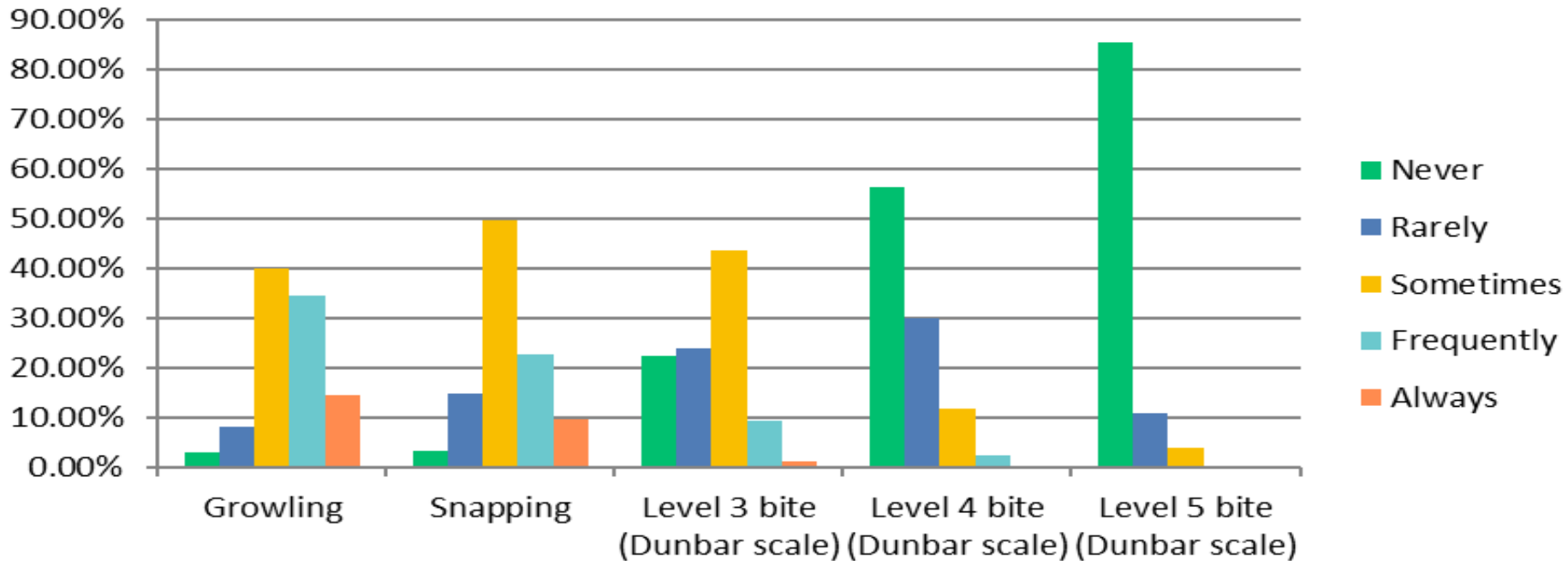
**Levels 1 and 2** comprise well over 99% of dog incidents. The dog is certainly not dangerous and more likely to be fearful, rambunctious, or out of control. Wonderful prognosis. Quickly resolve the problem with basic training (control) — especially oodles of Classical Conditioning, numerous repetitive Retreat n' Treat, Come/Sit/Food Reward and Back-up/Approach/Food Reward sequences, progressive desensitization handling exercises, plus numerous bite-inhibition exercises and games. Hand feed only until resolved; do NOT waste potential food rewards by feeding from a bowl.

**Level 3:** Prognosis is fair to good, provided that you have owner compliance. However, treatment is both time-consuming and not without danger. Rigorous bite-inhibition exercises are essential.

**Levels 4:** The dog has insufficient bite inhibition and is very dangerous. Prognosis is poor because of the difficulty and danger of trying to teach bite inhibition to an adult hard-biting dog and because absolute owner-compliance is rare. Only work with the dog in exceptional circumstances, e.g., the owner is a dog professional and has sworn 100% compliance. Make sure the owner signs a form in triplicate stating that they understand and take full responsibility that: 1. The dog is a Level 4 biter and is likely to cause an equivalent amount of damage WHEN it bites again (which it most probably will) and should therefore, be confined to the home at all times and only allowed contact with adult owners. 2. Whenever, children or guests visit the house, the dog should be confined to a single locked-room or roofed, chain-link run with the only keys kept on a chain around the neck of each adult owner (to prevent children or guests entering the dog's confinement area.) 3. The dog is muzzled before leaving the house and only leaves the house for visits to a veterinary clinic. 4. The incidents have all been reported to the relevant authorities — animal control or police. Give the owners one copy, keep one copy for your files and give one copy to the dog's veterinarian.

**Level 5 and 6:** The dog is extremely dangerous and mutilates. The dog is simply not safe around people. I recommend euthanasia because the quality of life is so poor for dogs that have to live out their lives in solitary confinement.

# Does your organization generally adopt out dogs who have a history of aggressive behavior in a home environment?



**There is no valid method for definitively predicting the risk of a shelter dog biting after adoption.**



# Develop Policies and Protocols



Intake discussions and/or surveys

How and when to gather additional info

When intake isn't going to help the animal or people

# Prompt, Efficient, and Thorough Decision-Making Process



# Intake Discussions and/or Surveys

Compassion simply means caring about what is important to another person and wanting to help in a way that is in line with their definition of help. Compassion is also an intentional commitment to try to understand others' experiences, values, and motivations without judgment.

**COMPASSION**

**C**

We accept the person and what is important to them, as well as where they are at in their lives. A strong relationship, even if it's only brief, is characterized by acceptance. In doing this, we believe in a person's absolute worth, their right to choose, as well as their strengths, experience, and potential.

**ACCEPTANCE**

**A**

**PARTNERSHIP**

We may be experts in the process or in a specific role, but people are ultimately the experts in themselves. By partnership, we mean that collaboration when working with a person who is accessing services is key.

**P**

**EVOCATION**

People have their own valuable lived and living experience, internal resources, and expertise about themselves. Evocation is about recognizing that people have everything they need. Our job is to help draw out their own ideas about change and reasons for change, rather than ordering reasons for change or telling people how and why to do something.

**E**



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<https://vancouverhumanesociety.bc.ca/trauma-informed-training/>

# Whenever Possible Gather Information in Advance



What have you found useful to collect accurate information and support people and their pets?





# Dog Personality Questionnaire

Your dog is unable to tell us what we need to know to place him/her in the best home possible.  
We need you to help him/her by giving detailed and honest answers.

Has your dog bitten anyone in the last ten days?  Yes  No If yes, did the bite break skin?  Yes  No

Has your dog ever bitten anyone?  Yes  No

Has your dog ever injured or killed another animal?  Yes  No If Yes, please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

**If YES to any of the above questions, please inform staff immediately.**

## **General Information**

Dog's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Breed(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you had this dog? \_\_\_\_\_

Where did you obtain this dog? \_\_\_\_\_



# What Type of Information Should we Gather?

The Dog

Background and History

Information about the Bite

Circumstances

Mitigating Factors

Organization Capacity

Other Considerations



# The Dog



Dog's size and age

Get to know the dog



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## Assessing Risk: Animal Factors

# Background and History



Bite history?

Known home history  
(positive, negative,  
unknown)?

Add'l behavior or medical  
concerns?



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## Assessing Risk: History



# The Bite



Sustained or  
uninterruptible?

Head, neck, torso  
purposefully bitten?

Redirected bite?



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## Assessing Risk: The Bite

# Circumstances



Warning signals?

Significant stress or overarousal?

Response to reasonable threat?

Dog forcibly escaped to bite target?



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## Assessing Risk: Circumstances

# Mitigating Factors



Physical exam? Any medical conditions?

Person bitten had fragile skin?

Accidental bite (play, breaking up dog fight)?



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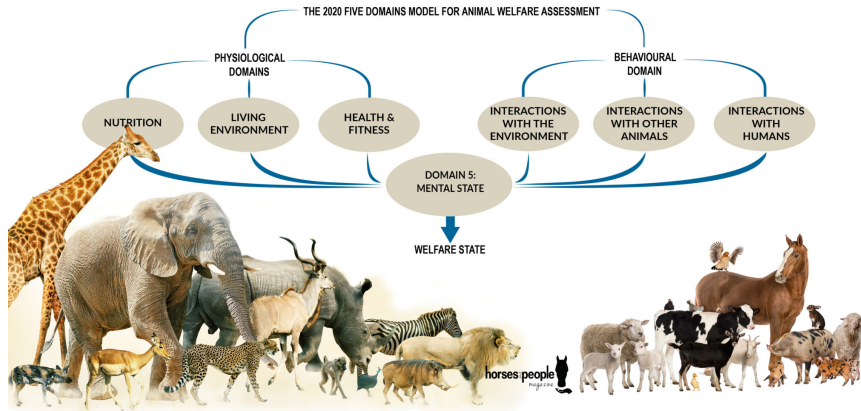
## Assessing Risk: Mitigating Factors

# Organization Capacity to...

Adequately and safely support this dog?

Provide good quality of life for dog, staff, other animals while waiting for home or foster?

Keep people and other animals safe?



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## Assessing Risk: Capacity

# Other Considerations



Consultation with a CAAB,  
aCAAB or DACVB

Could another organization  
adequately support this  
dog?



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## Assessing Risk: Other

# Is Shelter Intake the Best Option for this Pet?



# Risk appetite vs. risk tolerance

If risk appetite represents the official speed limit of 70, risk tolerance is how much faster you can go before likely getting a ticket.



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## How Much Risk?

# Develop Behavioral Adoption and Euthanasia Guidelines



But always  
consider the  
individual!



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## How Much Risk?



Build rapport

Adoption counseling

Educational opportunities

Matching programs

Post adoption follow-up

Post adoption support

Peer to peer support

Full disclosure

Adoption contracts



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**Risk Mitigation**

# Assessing Risk



# Assessing Risk



# Assessing Risk





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# How Can We Get Better at All This?

**Thank you!!**

**Sheila Segurson**

**Sheila@MaddiesFund.org**



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# Assessment of Behavior is Important -just not in the way we used to think-



- Welfare assessment
- Health assessment
- Behavior assessment test
- Coping assessment
- Assessment through routine interactions
- Problem-Oriented Behavior Record (SOAP)
- Functional assessment
- Risk assessment



Some challenges present risk, others uncertainty.



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# Uncertainty vs. Risk



We fail to think about:  
How similar to the past  
is this current situation?

How do the two  
situations differ?

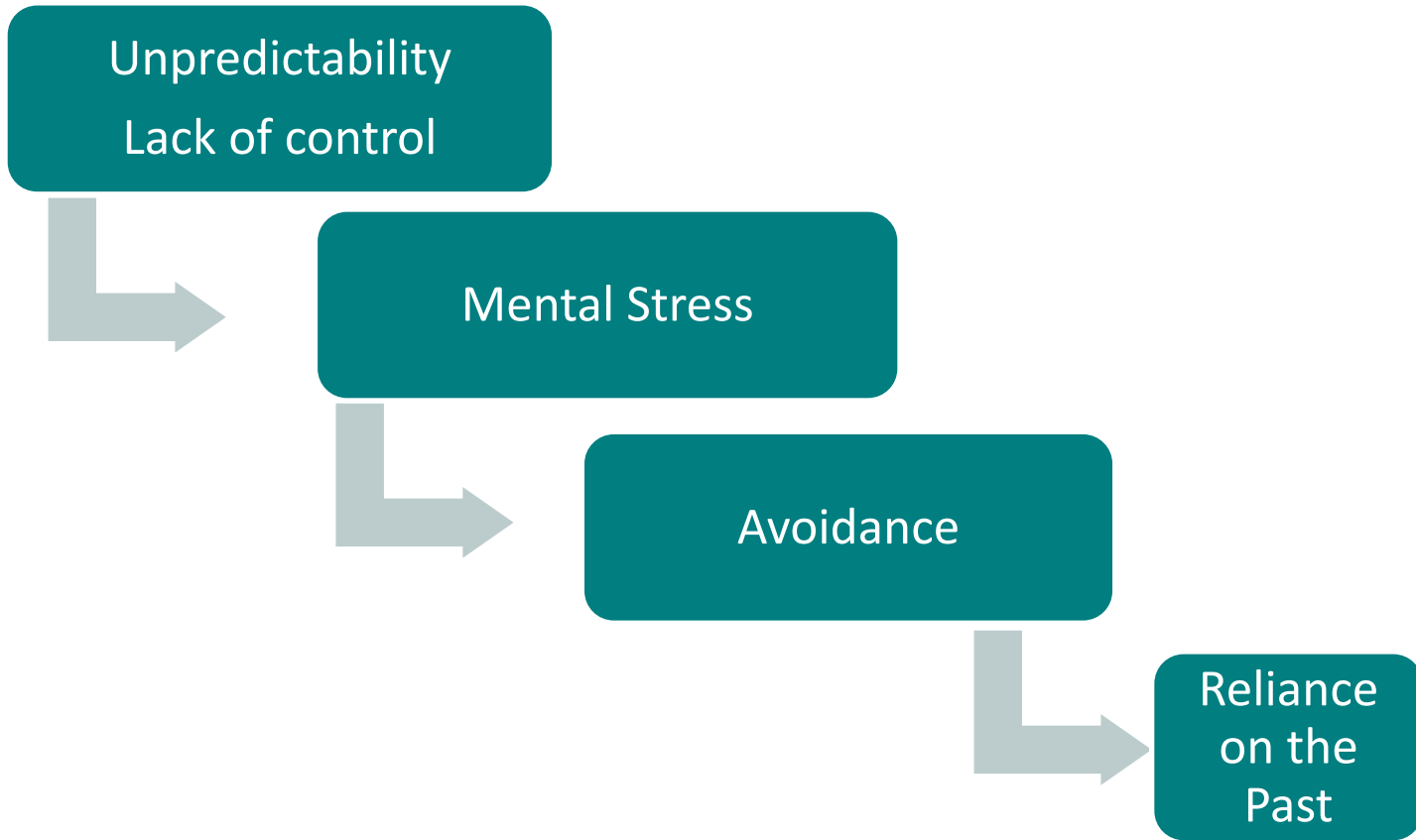


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# Uncertainty Avoidance



Unpredictability  
Lack of control

Dog behaves aggressively in  
playgroup

Mental Stress

Avoidance

Stop running  
playgroups

Opportunity

Reliance on the Past



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# Changing the Narrative