

Discussions about Animal Behavior and Pathway Planning that can help inform an organization's Adoptability Criteria Guidelines

Below is a list of behaviors that you may want to talk through with your team when pathway planning or creating behavioral adoptability guidelines for the animals in your care. The lists below are **not** intended as a list of reasons for behavior euthanasia, but instead as a list of animal behaviors that your team can talk through to determine what your next steps would be with an animal in your care who displays that behavior.

When discussing these behaviors, keep in mind all possible pathway plans for the animals in your care, as your team may decide that a certain behavior dictates specific pathways based on your available resources:

- Foster placement
- Behavior modification plan
- Placement with a breed specific rescue or foster-based rescue
- Further diagnostic testing
- Shelter swap (swap long stays for change of scenery/different adopter pool)
- Consultation with a certified applied animal behaviorist or veterinary behaviorist
- Giving them a roommate
- Pairing a young dog up with an older teacher dog
- Marketing the animal creatively / adoption promotion / sponsored adoption fee
- Prioritizing the animal for enrichment activities
- Changes to animal's environment in the shelter (ex: quieter dog run)
- Exploring options for behavior modification drugs with a veterinarian
- Prioritizing animal for adventures outside of the shelter (ex: dog day out, sleepovers, hikes)
- Bringing in outside resources for assistance; pre- and/or post-adoption (ex: one-on-one training sessions, series of training sessions)
- Humane euthanasia
- Etc

Animal behavioral adoptability guidelines can assist your team by creating parameters for making safe and responsible placement decisions and pathway plans. Placement decisions should take into account both the safety of your community and the animal's quality of life. Animals should be evaluated as individuals on a case-by-case basis and detailed information should be gathered and documented from as many sources as possible when discussing a particular animal (staff, fosters, animal control, previous guardians, etc).

Behavior incidents that occur under extenuating circumstances (ex: lactating mother with offspring, animal waking up from sedation) are always documented in the animal's history but typically not considered when making pathway planning decisions for that animal.

Dog Behaviors to Discuss:

How could your organization best serve the animal and your community when the following behaviors are present?

- Dogs who have a damaging bite history to humans
- Dogs who redirect their aggression on humans that results in physical harm
- Resource guarding

- Resource guarding that results in physical harm to a human
- Resource guarding that results in physical harm to another animal
- Resource guarding that includes shifting/unpredictable triggers for possessive aggression
- Resource guarding combined with offensive aggression
- Food aggression
- Dogs who inflict physical harm to a human due to handling sensitivity
- Dogs who require sedation in order to be safe for medical care
- Dogs who require ongoing medical handling for the foreseeable future and who cannot be safely handled for medical care
- Dogs who show offensive aggression
- Feral dogs
- Dogs who have a bite history to children
- Dogs who stalk children in a predatory manner
- Dogs who show extreme reactivity/offensive aggression towards other dogs on leash and who are also not successful interacting with other dogs off leash
- Dogs who fixate on other animals on leash and are not able to be redirected
- Dogs who exhibit uninterrupted aggression through a fence toward another dog
- Dogs who have a damaging bite history to another dog
- Dogs who show a high level of aggression during a bite incident (shaking even if no wounds, latching on and not letting go, throat bite, etc)
- Dogs who have severely injured or killed other small animals
- Dogs who break through barriers in order to aggress towards other animals
- Dogs who have severely injured or killed hoofed animals (goats, sheep, pony, etc)
- Dogs who show an escalating progression of aggression
- Dogs who are not safe for handling by staff / fosters / volunteers / public
- Dogs who have been deemed dangerous or who have a dangerous dog designation by Animal Control in any county
- Dogs who have preventative measures in place by Animal Control in any county
- Dogs who show atypical behaviors (losing weight, wall bounding, stress panting, self mutilation, obsessive behaviors, extreme vocalization)
- Dogs who show signs of depression (multiple days of not eating, losing interest in activities, unwilling to engage, severe kennel aversion)
- Dog who have a poor quality of life determined by using the Penn State Quality of Life app
- Dogs with extreme separation anxiety
- Dogs who have multiple, significant behavioral issues
- Dogs who require considerable management in order to be successful in a home – whose adopters will need to significantly change their lives to manage the dog in the home

Cat Behaviors to Discuss:

How could your organization best serve the animal and your community when the following behaviors are present?

- Cats who have a damaging bite history to humans
- Cats who show pronounced and prolonged signs of distress (hissing, growling, spitting, swatting, panic, making serious attempts to flee) in the presence of, or in anticipation of exposure to, people
 - Criteria that must be met when considering placing a cat as a barn cat/working cat: cat's living environment history, cat's behavior towards other cats, cat's medical needs

- Cats who inflict damaging bites to humans while exhibiting contradictory body language
- Cats with a repeated, intensely damaging scratch history to humans that occurs without any indications of play behavior and during handling that would be appropriate for any average adopter
- Socialized cats who have an unprovoked, damaging bite history to humans
- Unsocialized cats who have an unprovoked, damaging bite history to humans
- Cats who show offensive aggression to children
- Cats who stalk children in a predatory manner (low body, hard eye, followed by growl/lunge/snap)
- Cats who demonstrate aggression towards other cats
- Cats who show aggression towards other animals
- Resource guarding
 - Resource guarding that results in physical harm to a human
 - Resource guarding that results in physical harm to another animal
 - Resource guarding that included shifting/unpredictable triggers for possessive aggression
 - Resource guarding combined with offensive aggression
 - Food aggression
- Cats who have multiple, significant behavioral issues
- Cats who are not safe for handling by staff / fosters / volunteers / public
- Cats who require sedation in order to be safe for medical care
- Cats who have ongoing medical care needs and their stress levels with medical handling prevent them getting the necessary medical attention/treatment
- Cats who require ongoing medical handling for the foreseeable future and who cannot be safely handled for medical care
- Cats who require considerable management in order to be successful in a home – whose adopters will need to significantly change their lives to manage the cat in the home

Definitions and Bite Scales, Dogs

Bite

Open mouth contact to human flesh or clothing, or to another animal. See bite scales below.

Bite inhibition

Degree to which dog moderates tooth contact while biting (see also "mouth" definitions, below).

Bite threshold

Intensity of stimulus or number of combined stimuli required in order for dog to bite.

Damaging Bite History Towards Humans

Level three, or higher, bite history per the Ian Dunbar scale. Excludes fluke bites.

Damaging Bite History Towards Dogs

Multiple incidents of level three bites or one incident of a level four bite, or higher, bite history per the Cara Shannon scale. Excludes fluke bites.

Feral

A domestic animal that has returned to a wild state. These animals are usually unsocialized to people and display significant fear and/or aggression when approached by people.

Fluke Bite / Extenuating Circumstance

Bite by a dog that occurs during uncommon circumstances that are not likely to be repeated (e.g. while in acute physical pain, while with puppies during lactation, while being physically abused, while under the influence of sedation, redirected aggression while being attacked as in the case of a dog fight). Fluke bites, while not constituting evidence of an aggression problem, are evidence of good or poor mouth.

Mouth Definitions

If more than one bite on record of differing severities, the most severe bite will be used to classify, excepting fluke bites. Soft play-mouthing during rough-housing, soft mouth taking treats or active avoidance of fingers placed in mouth are suggestive of good mouth however not confirmation - mouth still classified as unknown. Neither bites in dog-dog fights nor assess-a-hand bites constitute adequate evidence of mouth in dog-human aggression cases.

Good mouth

Single bite & release or multiple bites resulting in no punctures (level one or level two bites), bruising or lacerations whatsoever. Redirected bites during dog fights may not count.

Moderate mouth

Single bite & release with laceration or shallow punctures with or without shallow laceration in one direction

Poor mouth

Single bite & release with deep punctures, bruising and/or tearing in more than one direction (grab-shake) or multiple bites

Unknown mouth

No bites on record

Mouthing

Inhibited play-biting during greeting, play or when excited.

Normal Escalation

Shift to next level of threat in conjunction with intensified stimulus presentation.

Offensive aggression

Lunging, growling, snarling or snapping while moving toward the stimulus.

Predatory Manner

Dog shows low body and hard eye followed by growl/lunge/snarl/snap while moving toward the stimulus

Protracted Warning

Presence of at least two of the following: growling, snarling (baring of teeth), snapping (air-bite without contact), where growling or snarling or both are sustained for a minimum of three seconds in spite of continued/intensified stimulus presentation. While being handled, presence of at least two of the following for any duration: rapid orientation, avoidance, growling, snapping, inhibited slow placement of jaws on hand or arm. Evident on three consecutive trials.

Rapid Escalation

Shift to next level of threat without provocation, and/or shift directly to biting within less than seconds of first threat signal.

Redirection

Showing a purposeful change of target.

Redirected Bite

Bite to a human who is not the original target of the aggression (e.g. while walking past kennels, or while being removed from a dog fight.) The severity of redirected bites to humans can be used to assess mouth (degree of bite inhibition).

Snap

Bite without contact, air-snap

Trend

Reaction to specific stimuli can be replicated at least three times

Unpredictable

Not showing protracted warnings, not showing normal escalation, not following a trend, not being able to replicate a behavior.



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.

Cara Shannon Dog to Dog Bite Scale (online)

Dog to Dog Bite Hierarchy	
Level Zero	There is air snapping but no contact to the fur or skin (fur should be dry - if the fur is wet, contact was made and the bite is not a Level Zero).
Level One	A bite and release with contact to the fur, superficial scratches or removal of fur, where estimates would indicate that no more than 5% of the dog's canine teeth entered the other dog's body -- or -- a bite where a dog grips another dog's body and does not release but does not inflict external or internal damage.
Level Two	A bite and release where estimates would indicate that 5 to 15% of the dog's canine teeth entered the other dog's body.

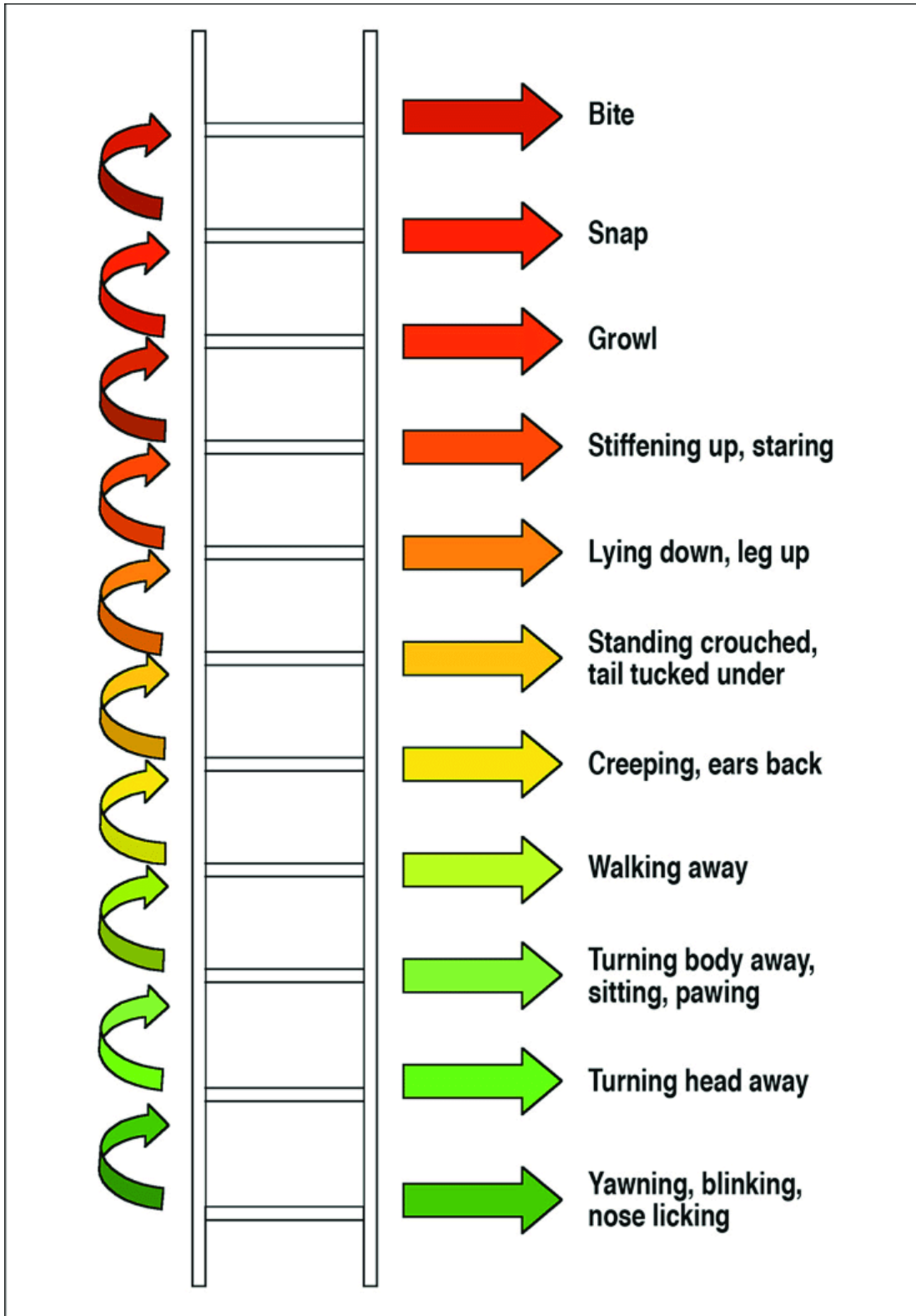
Level Three	There are lacerations or punctures where estimates would indicate 15 to 30% of the dog's canine teeth entered the other dog's body. There may be tearing of the skin from the underlying musculature or subcutaneous pockets.
Level Four	There are deep lacerations where estimates would indicate that 30 to 50% of the dog's canine teeth entered other dog's body --or-- there are no external wounds of any significance but exploratory surgery reveals lacerations, tearing, or puncture wounds to the underlying musculature of the dog -- or -- there was a report or evidence of shaking of the head. There are no crushing injuries or serious internal injuries.
Level Five	A bite with holding pressure and possibly shaking of the head -- external injuries may or may not be present, but serious internal injuries are present. Internal injuries may be found through exploratory surgery or indicated by shock or vomiting, skin bulging up when breathing, or displacement of the ribs.
Level Six	The victim dies - bites may be single or multiple but will frequently be multiple.

Application notes --

Bite styles defined: There are four styles of bite that are used in this chart. The first, called a bite and release, means the dog came in quickly with its mouth and primarily used the front teeth to bite but then quickly moved away. The dog does not clamp down with the entire mouth. The second is a bite with pressure, typically where the dog uses the entire mouth rather than just the front teeth and the dog bites down with some amount of pressure applied. The dog may either hold the pressure or release immediately. The third bite style occurs where the dog rests its teeth on a person but does not bite down with any amount of pressure at all. The fourth is a bite that involves shaking of the head while biting.

Analysis where the bite style conflicts with the injury inflicted by the bite: In the event of a bite incident where the injury inflicted and the style of the bite are in conflict (in other words, where the style of bite indicates one level of bite but the injury inflicted indicates another level), the injury should trump the style of bite involved in all cases except in a case where the dog shakes its head while biting. In the case of shaking of the head, the style trumps the injury and the bite is automatically raised to a Level Four bite even if the injuries involved are not those described in a Level Four bite. Example One: Your client reports that she lifted her dog up into her arms to help it escape from the attack of another dog. When she did so, her dog bit her on the neck. The bite style was a bite with pressure but no hold. The client is certain that it was a clamp down type of bite with the whole mouth biting down and not a bite and release type of bite with only the front teeth coming in and snapping quickly; however, the injuries were consistent with a Level Two bite (small punctures and medium bruising). The owner estimated that the dog's canine teeth entered the body about 15-30-% of the way. In this case, despite the style of bite, the injury level would trump the style and the bite would be considered a Level Two bite. If, however, the owner reported that the dog bit and shook its head back and forth while biting, the style of bite would trump the injury involved and the bite would be classified as a Level Four bite.

Dog Ladder of Aggression



Definitions & Body Language, Cats

Bite

A bite that breaks skin and causes bleeding OR causes bruising or swelling OR requires that a bite report be taken OR requires professional medical attention.

Feral

A domestic animal that has returned to a wild state. These animals are usually unsocialized to people and display significant fear and/or aggression when approached by people.

Fluke Bite / Extenuating Circumstance

Bite by a cat that occurs during uncommon circumstances that are not likely to be repeated (e.g. while in acute physical pain, while with kittens during lactation, while being physically abused, while under the influence of sedation, redirected aggression while being attacked as in the case of a fight).

Fluke bites, while not constituting evidence of an aggression problem, are evidence of good or poor mouth.

Mouthing

Inhibited play-biting during greeting, play or when excited.

Normal Escalation

Shift to next level of threat in conjunction with intensified stimulus presentation.

Offensive aggression

Lunging, chasing, growling, scratching or snapping while moving toward the stimulus.

Physiological signs of fear include:

Dilated pupils, piloerection, increased heart rate, increased respiration or panting, trembling, urination or defecation, hyper-salivation, changes in appetite, excessive shedding, and footpad sweating.

Rapid Escalation

Shift to next level of threat without provocation, and/or shift directly to biting within less than seconds of first threat signal.

Scratch

Repeatedly using claws, breaking skin and causing bleeding OR causing bruising or swelling OR requires the human to seek professional medical attention.

Snap

Bite without contact, air-snap

Trend

Reaction to specific stimuli can be replicated at least three times

Unpredictable

Not showing protracted warnings, not showing normal escalation, not following a trend, not being able to replicate a behavior.

Warning signs may consist of:













Tail switching very deliberately or only at the tip, eyes dilating, staring and/or hard eye, intentional movements such as head whipping, ears swiveling back, freezing, skin rippling, growling, hissing, spitting, swatting, moving away from you.

Cat Pawstive Behavior Scale ([online](#))



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When coding behavior on the Behavior Journal please use the following scale:

Score	Body Postures	Head Postures
1 Relaxed	<p>Activity – sleeping or resting, alert or active, may be playing Body – lying on side, on belly or sitting; if standing or moving, back horizontal Breathing – slow to normal Legs – bent, hind legs may be laid out; when standing extended Tail – extended or loosely wrapped; up or loosely down when standing</p> 	<p>Head – laid on surface or over body, some movement Eyes – closed to open, pupils slit to normal size Ears – normal to forward Whiskers – normal to forward Sounds – none, purr</p> 
2 Alert	<p>Activity – resting, awake or actively exploring Body – lying on belly or sitting; if standing or moving the back is horizontal Breathing – normal Legs – bent; when standing extended Tail – on body or curved back; up or tense downwards when standing; may be twitching</p> 	<p>Head – over the body, some movement Eyes – open normally, pupils normal Ears – normal or erected to front or back Whiskers – normal to forward Sounds – none or meow</p> 
3 Tense	<p>Activity – resting or alert, may be actively exploring, trying to escape Body – lying on belly or sitting; if standing or moving the back of the body is lower than the front (“sinking”) Breathing – normal Legs – bent, hind legs bent and front legs extended when standing Tail – close to body; tense downwards or curled forward, may be twitching when standing.</p> 	<p>Head – over the body or pressed to body, little or no movement Eyes – wide open or pressed together, pupils normal to partially dilated Ears – erected to front or back Whiskers – normal to forward Sounds – none, meow, or plaintive meow</p> 
4 Anxious	<p>Activity – alert, may be actively trying to escape Body – lying on belly or sitting; if standing or moving the back of the body is lower than the front Breathing – normal or fast Legs – under body, bent when standing Tail – close to the body; may be curled forward close to body when standing. The tip may move up and down or side to side.</p> 	<p>Head – on the plane of the body, little or no movement Eyes – wide open, pupils dilated Ears – partially flattened Whiskers – normal to forward or back Sounds – none, plaintive meow, growling, yowling</p> 
5 Fearful	<p>Activity – motionless, alert or crawling Body – lying on belly or crouched directly on top of all paws, may be shaking; if standing the whole body is near to the ground, may be shaking Breathing – fast Legs – bent; when standing bent near to surface Tail – close to the body; curled forward close to the body when standing.</p> 	<p>Head – near to surface motionless Eyes – fully open, pupils fully dilated Ears – fully flattened Whiskers – back Sounds – none, plaintive meow, growling, yowling</p> 
6 Terrified	<p>Activity – motionless alert Body – crouched directly on top of all paws, shaking. Hair on back and tail bushy. Breathing – fast Legs – stiff or bent to increase apparent size Tail – close to body</p> 	<p>Head – lower than the body Eyes – fully opened, pupils fully dilated Ears – fully flattened, back on head Whiskers – back Sounds – none, plaintive meow, growling, yowling, hissing</p> 

This form is based on the Cat Stress Scale developed by Kessler & Turner (1997)