

Big Dogs, **Big Hearts** Rescue Inc.

FOSTER CARE PROTOCOL

FOUR THINGS TO ALWAYS REMEMBER

1. SAFETY FIRST!

This is the most important thing to remember, ALWAYS. This document will give you recommendations on how to avoid situations that cause problems. But whenever anyone's safety is at risk, we recommend you do whatever you need to do to prevent harm, regardless of any other recommendations in this document.

2. DOGS ARE NOT "KIDS IN FUR SUITS"

Even though we may love them as much as we love children. Dogs don't speak English and they don't understand English. They growl at things that annoy or scare them, chew the woodwork and defecate on rugs because this is normal behavior for dogs, it is not willful, stubborn or dominance behavior.

3. CAPTURED BY ALIENS!

That's probably what it feels like to some rescue dogs. They are moved without warning from one place to another, often because they didn't understand what was expected of them and are no longer wanted. They are often untrained and unruly. *And they are most often unsure of what is expected of them because they have never been taught to live in the human world and only know the skills to live in the dog world.* It is up to us to help them learn the skills they need to survive (literally) in the human world.

4. "BAD DOG!"

Never, ever use physical punishment or dominance posturing, including scruff or face grabs or alpha rolls, these are threatening to a dog and can result in an attack. Instead use positive correction.

To Avoid Problems, Avoid Stress and Fear

When I see a spider, I shriek and run as fast as I can; you think they are the most fascinating things in the world!

Your idea of a great night is to have a huge party with lots of people, I'd much rather have a quiet dinner with a few good friends.

It is never safe to assume that a dog has the same feelings about a situation as you do.

Learning to understand dog body language and recognizing stress signals is critical for avoiding problems. “Calming Signals” (book and video) by Turid Rugaas is an excellent resource for dog body language and we strongly recommend you purchase or borrow a copy from a friend or your local library. By being able to recognize the pre-cursor signals of stress, you should have the opportunity to remove the dog from the situation before something happens.

Common causes of stress and/or fear in dogs:

- 1. Things and Noises:** Do expect your foster to startle and balk at inanimate objects or noises. Use desensitization to help your foster adjust to the inanimate object or noise instead of forcing your foster to confront the inanimate object or noise. Things dogs may react to: flapping plastic bags, the teakettle whistle, large signs or darn near anything.
- 2. People:** Do give your foster time to adjust to your family and home before introducing new people. The recommended waiting period is 2 weeks before the foster is introduced to other people, but it could easily be longer. Learn your foster dog’s stress signals and do not introduce new people until the foster is rarely exhibiting stress signals. Things to avoid until your foster is rarely exhibiting stress signals: having a party, having house guests, showing your foster to your friends.
- 3. Children:** Do expect your foster to react differently to children than she does to adults. Teach your own children good dog skills - http://www.doggonesafe.com/Speak_Dog and <http://www.familypaws.com/communication> are excellent sources of information about children, dogs and safety. Why children are different to dogs: children are at eye level, children move their bodies differently than adults, children smell differently than adults.
- 4. Tight Places:** Do expect your foster to be nervous in narrow places and small, crowded rooms. These are not the places to introduce people, cut toenails or medicate your foster: Examples: entry halls, any small room with only one doorway, doorways.
- 5. New Places:** Do expect your foster to be nervous in new places. Like introducing new people, wait at least 2 weeks before taking your foster dog anywhere except necessary vet visits. Don’t go to the music festival the first time you go out, go to a quiet park or the quiet home of a friend. Go lots of quiet places before you start to increase the distraction. Keep the visits short at first. Places to avoid until your foster is calm: the pet store, parks where there are a lot of children, downtown on the crowded sidewalk.

- 6. Strange Lighting:** Do expect your foster to bark and react to things in the dark that your foster ignores in the daylight. Do expect your foster to react to things and people that are back lit. Things your foster might react to: a lawn chair, her favorite person when the person is backlit (have the person speak to the dog, the sound of the person's voice will let the dog recognize the person), a sudden movement.
- 7. Threatening body positions:**
- **Hugging:** The most common cause of bites to pre-adolescent and adolescent children is hugging. Unless they have been desensitized to hugging, dogs hate to be hugged. In "The Other End Of The Leash" by Dr. Patricia McConnell, there are some great photos of people lovingly hugging their dogs while the dogs look like they'd much rather be darn near anywhere else!
 - **Leaning over:** with a dog that trusts you (not with a foster!), you can try this at home. Have the dog perpendicular to you, more or less centered. Do what we all do all the time, bend over the dog's back and pet or scratch the dog on the opposite side. Watch for a quick lip lick. Watch the dog "curve". Then lean backwards so you are leaning slightly away from the dog and pet or scratch the dog on the same side. Watch the dog straighten out. "Curving" and lip licking are calming signals that say "I am not a threat"; he's trying to clue you in to his benign intentions because he wants you to stop being so darn threatening, even though you think you're giving him loving pets.
 - **Face to face:** Dogs greet each other by arcing towards each other or coming in from the side, not straight at each other like people. Have you ever had a dog try to "get a hug too" when you are hugging someone or think the dog is jealous because you're hugging and the dog is trying to "butt in"? What the dog is really doing is "splitting". Face to face hugs are too much frontal contact for dogs and "splitting" is one way dogs attempt to calm down what they perceive as tense situations.
 - **Dominance posturing.** Look in the mirror. Can you move your mouth like a dog can? Move your ears like a dog can? What you might imagine is your Oscar worthy imitation of an alpha wolf doesn't quite look that way to a dog ;-)
Submissive fear behavior can turn into fear aggression in less than the blink of an eye; even a black belt can't move fast enough to avoid a dog bite. Use positive correction when your foster is doing something you don't want.
- 8. Heat:** Do expect your foster to be cranky when it's hot. Keep activity and stimulation (people, places, things) to a minimum when it's hot and keep the time of any activity and stimulation short. Examples: going to the beach, going on long walks, outside parties.
- 9. Sleeping:** Do expect your foster to react if she's awoken suddenly by a human touch or sudden noise. Avoid problems by keeping your distance when your foster is

sleeping. Things that may startle: children running close to the sleeping dog, someone knocking on the door, other dogs approaching the sleeping dog.

- 10. Other Dogs:** Do keep your dogs and the foster separate until the foster has had a chance to settle in. Always introduce dogs with safety as the primary consideration. Avoid strange dogs. Examples of things to avoid: places where dogs are allowed off lead, introductions in small areas with no escape routes, introductions on tight leashes.
- 11. Eating:** Do allow your foster dog to eat in peace and quiet, privately. Always remember that eating means surviving. What to do while your foster is eating: leave her alone, no people, especially children, and other animals, including the cat.
- 12. Discomfort and Pain:** Do expect discomfort to lower the reactivity bar. Just like we tend to be less patient when we don't feel good, dogs are dogs and do not have the patience of Job. Things to do when your foster doesn't feel good: keep everything low key, do not visit the pet store, give your foster lots of "chill out" time in a crate or safe place with something yummy to chew (if your foster doesn't have digestive problems).
- 13. Collar Grabbing:** Do expect your foster to react if you grab his collar. This is a frequent cause of bites. Do desensitize your foster to collar grabbing and attach a short leash so you can grab that instead. Common reasons to grab collars: you are trying to get the dog off the bed or the sofa, the dog is doing something wrong, you are trying to get the dog's attention.
- 14. Hyperactivity:** Do not engage in activities with your foster that cause your foster to get hyped up. Good arousal and bad arousal release the exact same hormones into the blood stream and good arousal can turn to bad arousal in an instant. Dogs do not need extended periods of frantic play; do not play actively for more than 3 minutes. Things that cause dogs to get hyped up: chasing, tuggy, fetch.
- 15. Bad Hair Days:** We all have them. Dogs have them too. Respect the dog's feelings and keep things extra calm if the dog appears more nervous or stressed than usual. No one is going to die if you decide to postpone that trip to the pet store or go without the dog, but if the dog is stressed and bites, the dog will die.

The Big Do Nots

- 1. Do not ever use physical punishment.**
- 2. Do not ever allow anyone to put his or her face in the dog's face.**
- 3. Do not ever allow anyone (especially children, who move fast!) to hug the dog.**
- 4. Do not ignore stress signals.**

5. Do not ever forget that you are responsible for the safety of the dog. If people behave foolishly (“but all dogs love me”), it is your responsibility to step between the dog and the person and protect the dog. It is far better to be rude than to have the person attacked.

The Big Do’s

1. Do be aware of your foster dog’s body language at all times. It’s hard at first, but it will become second nature after a while.
2. Do attach a short leash to your foster dog’s collar so if you need to grab your foster dog you can grab the leash and not the collar or the dog.
3. Do provide a safe “chill out” place for your foster to relax.
4. Do start gentle, non-aversive training right away. It helps put structure in the dog’s life and starts to teach the dog the right behaviors.
5. “Lemon brains, but we love them anyway.” Jean Donaldson, “Culture Clash” Do remember that you have a melon-sized brain with a gazillion folds to increase the surface area and your foster dog has a smooth brain the size of a lemon. Use that big brain!

I, _____ have read the attached Foster Protocols and agree to abide by them.

Signature

Name Printed

Address

Address

Telephone Number

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