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<http://www.aspcapro.org/safer-faqs.php>

# Part 4: ASPCA SAFER™

## Becoming a Certified SAFER Assessor



# Your Presenters



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# Summary of Part 1



- Dr. Emily Weiss's research on SAFER
- SAFER research from other shelters
- Ways to gather information (besides the assessment)
- How SAFER can be used

# Summary of Part 2



- Equipment needed to perform SAFER assessment
- Requirements for assessment room
- Handler's role
- Observer's role
- Handling highlights of each item

# Summary of Part 3



- Choice during assessment
- Behavioral profile
- Objective observations
- Scoring
- Safety nets

Note: All sessions are recorded and available on [ASPCapro.org](https://www.aspcapro.org); links to Parts 1-3 will be emailed following this presentation

# Recap: How is SAFER used?

- Part of placement profile
  - Adoption
  - Rescue
  - Foster
- Intake tool
- Prevention of breed bans
- Any situation where you want to gather more info



# SAFER can increase live release!

- Decrease length of stay
- Decrease in euthanasia
- Decrease returns
- Increase adoptions
- Increase transfers
- Save more dogs that are fearful and anxious in the shelter setting





# Agenda

- SAFER Certification History
- Process of submitting for certification
- Hear from two shelters using SAFER with certified Assessors
- Preparing for SAFER certification



# Question to Group:

Outside of animal welfare, what jobs require certification in order to perform normal duties?  
(example: dental hygienist)

Please type answer in chat.



# SAFER Certification History

- PetSmart Charities Rescue Waggin' transport program
  - » SAFER was used at all source and destination shelters
  - » Dogs were assessed pre and post transport
  - » Significant differences in scores between the two assessments
- Review of recorded assessments revealed variability in assessment technique

# SAFER Certification History

- SAFER certification intended to standardize assessment
- Certification required for Assessors in transport program
- Tracking assessments pre & post transport with certification in place:
  - 3,000 dogs were assessed at source and destination shelters
  - Only 3% of dogs in transport program assessed differently



# Certification:

A confirmation of certain characteristics, often provided by external review, education, and/or assessment

Ensures accountability



# Certification

- Certification ensures:
  - Dogs are being handled appropriately
  - Behavior is being observed and scored accurately
  - The Assessor is maintaining his own safety
  - Performing assessment as designed
    - Reduces likelihood of dog exhibiting false positive or false negative behavior

# Who does certification benefit?

- **Dogs:** identify behavior needs to increase live outcomes
- **Shelter:** pay raises for staff, share objective information between staff, rescues, vets, and staff can provide adopters with educated support for their dog
- **Adopters:** increased trust in shelter, more realistic expectations and may get increased post-adoption support

# SAFER Certification

- Submit 3 full assessments and worksheets for review
  - Submit DVD of video or upload link
  - Meet live via webcam
- Certification only occurs through ASPCA
- Written feedback is provided to the Assessor
- ASPCApro.org has more info and fact sheet for download (will send after this live webinar)





# Incorrect Squeeze



## Keep doing this.....

- Well done in the second attempt of this item!
- Great job saying the word before you touched the dog; allowed the dog the choice to pull back his paw.
- Second squeeze your positioning is excellent, so refer to that for your practice.

## Please modify this.....

- Ensure the phone is off before starting the assessment.
- On the first squeeze, your hands should be switched for safety.
- Avoid dropping the leash at any time during the assessment.

# Once Certified...

- Certification is valid for 1 year
  - Recertification is achieved via the same process
  - Certification is achieved by the Assessor and NOT the agency

ASPCA® SAFER™ CERTIFIED ASSESSOR

*Sally Smith*



*has successfully demonstrated the skills and knowledge to correctly conduct the ASPCA®'s SAFER™ assessment (SAFER) and is hereby recognized as a SAFER™ Certified Assessor. Certification is valid for one year from the date of certification.*

Certification is limited solely to the individual's identified above demonstrated ability to conduct the assessment correctly, and does not extend to the placement

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Emily Weiss".

Emily Weiss Ph.D., Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist

12/18/2012

Date Certified



**Meet two shelters  
using SAFER  
with certified Assessors.**

# CHARLESTON ANIMAL SOCIETY

## CHARLESTON, SC



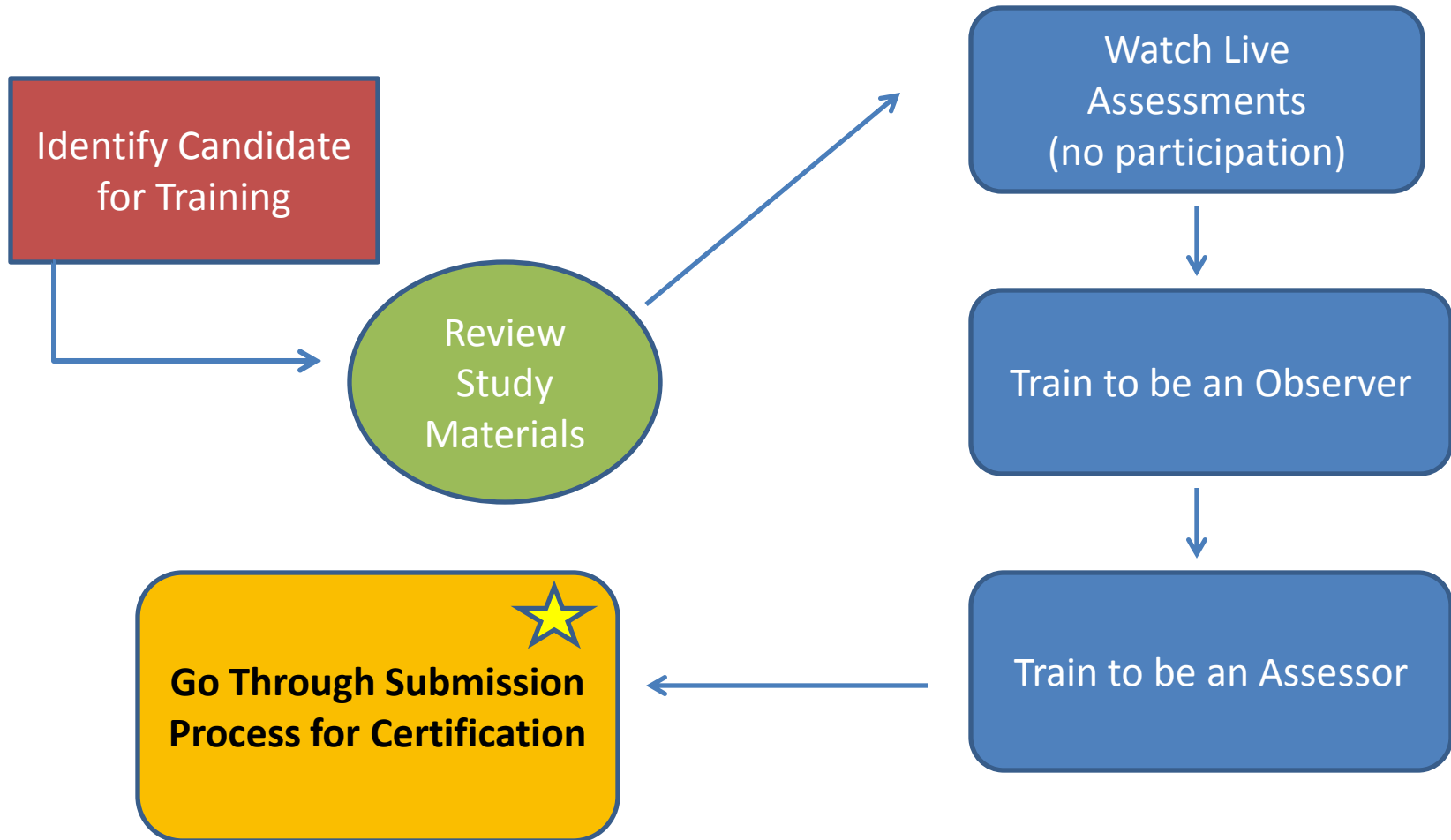
**Paul Aytes**  
Lead Certified  
SAFER Assessor



**Sarah Boyd, DMV**  
Director of Shelter  
Health and Wellness



# PATHWAY OF TRAINING



# CANDIDATES FOR SAFER ASSESSING



## Should ideally:

- Have an interest in SAFER, because without an interest teaching is difficult
- Be naturally observant and detail oriented in observations
- Be able to communicate clearly
- Be comfortable around dogs
- Be as unbiased as possible
- Be thoughtful and objective about behavior observations

# FROM CANDIDATE TO TRAINEE



- The ASPCA SAFER DVD is given for study
- A Handbook comprised of information gathered from ASPCApro.org, provided for study
- Trainee then views Assessor and Observer during live assessments
- Assessments are viewed until a base of understanding of SAFER is developed



# FROM TRAINEE TO OBSERVER



Goal of training to become an Observer:

- Fine tune behavior observation skills and use of objective statements
- Practice choosing appropriate scores based on the dog's body language
- Demonstrate helpful communication with the Assessor so the Assessor may better understand how the dog is responding to each item

# FROM OBSERVER TO ASSESSOR



- SAFER Assessor training begins when the certified team feels confident in the trainee's skill set of recognizing the dog's body language to ensure handling safety
- Trainee performs SAFER on a dog from the adoption floor with direct oversight from the trainer
- Trainer provides feedback on trainee's technique
- Trainee must demonstrate continued use of proper SAFER terminology

# FROM ASSESSOR TRAINING TO SAFER CERTIFIED



- Trainee is ready to assess dogs not already assessed by SAFER certified team
- Advice is given once errors are made, by first giving a compliment and then by stating the error, and ways to work around it
- Videos are collected for certification and kept for internal review with trainee and trainer prior to submission
- After internal review, video and worksheets are emailed to the ASPCA for official certification review

**QUESTIONS?**

# Wisconsin Humane Society



**Natalie Zielinski, CBCC-KA,  
CPDT-KA**

Behavior Program Manager  
Wisconsin Humane Society

# Wisconsin Humane Society

## Milwaukee WI

- Two Campuses with a 3<sup>rd</sup> on the way
- Comprehensive adoption program that matches nearly 10,000 homeless companion animals annually
- Lifesaving medical care for nearly 20,000 companion and wild animals annually
- 120 staff members
- 6 full-time and 1 part time staff in the behavior department across campuses
- 5 SAFER Certified Assessors with 5 more ready to submit this month



# What SAFER Certification Looks Like at WHS



## 20 hour program spread over 3-6 weeks

- Listen to ASPCA Webinar on Canine Communication: Understanding Canine Body Language (1 hour)
- Watch the SAFER training video (1 hour)
- Observe live SAFER assessments (2 hours)
- Help call out behavior changes and scoring (2 hours)
- Practice as the Observer (2 hours)
- Introduction to handling (2 hours)
- Practice as the Handler (2 hours)
- Perform SAFER assessments (8 hours)

# The 4 P's to Successful Certification



- Prepare
- Participate
- Practice
- Perform



# Prepare



- ASPCA Webinar Canine Communication: Understanding Canine Body Language
- SAFER training video and training guide
- Observe live SAFER assessments (2 hours)

# Participate



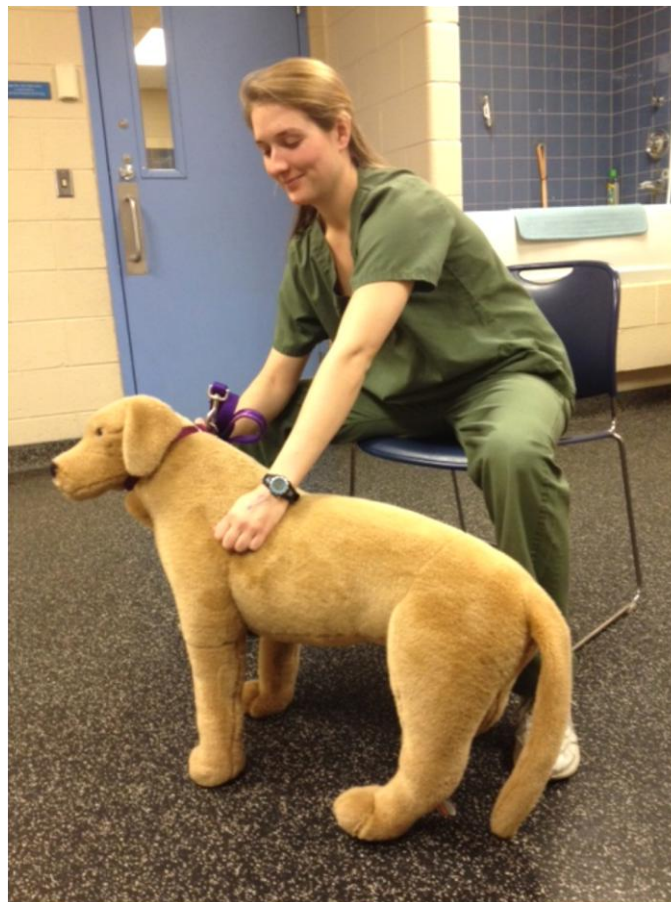
- Start to test your skills by calling out changes in behavior and scoring with the Observer and Assessor
- Have the manual and blank assessment handy for reference
- Be sure to video record all assessments and look back when there are questions

# Practice

- Starting with the Observer role, call out behavior changes and discuss the proper scoring for each item with your Assessor.
- Review the videos
- Ask questions

# More Practice

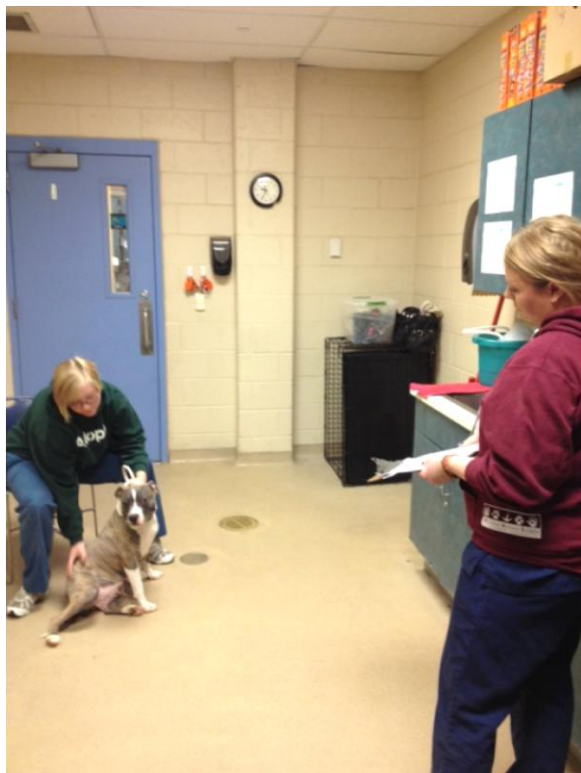
- When beginning to handle, start with a lifelike fake dog, especially if the trainee was not able to attend a workshop
- Once the trainee is moving fluidly from one item to another, start to work with previously assessed dogs (2 hours)



# Checking In and Giving Feedback

- How do they feel things are going?
- Are they receiving positive feedback on the things they are doing well?
- Do they have any questions?
- If other staff are participating in the training, be sure to get their feedback as well.

# Perform



- In this stage the new trainee is able to perform in both the Assessor and Observer role (8 hours)

# Next Steps

- After working through the 4 P's you may already have your certification videos!
- If not, don't worry, you are almost there!
- Be sure to check out the resources at the link below and look over the SAFER Certification Checklist and SAFER Certification Fact Sheet for your final steps.

<http://www.aspcapro.org/training-and-certification.php>

# Keys to Success

- Build SAFER certification into your job descriptions and requirements.
- Set out timelines and check-in points to help keep staff on target.
- Encourage certified staff to participate in the training of others
- Schedule trainings on consecutive days or within the same week, offering compact training sessions





# Extra Bonuses to a Standardized SAFER Training Program

- Shared understanding of body language and terminology
- Staff learn to give positive feedback regularly and are able to receive constructive feedback, this will flow into other areas of their work 😊
- By continually training new staff and providing refreshers on a regular basis, it helps to keep current staff fresh and on their toes

# Preparing for Certification

- Practice with safe dogs
- Focus on proper handling: use guidebook and DVD
- Schedule a Q&A session with ASPCA SAFER Team
- Have pizza party and review own videos
- Take coaching session



# Preparing for Certification



- Record every assessment!
  - Behavior can occur quickly
  - Reviewing video can be critical in scoring
  - Improving handling of Assessor
  - Serve as record for dog post-adoption
  - Use recorded assessments for certification

# Remote SAFER Coaching

- Support towards obtaining certification
- Remote teaching via webcam



# Remote SAFER Coaching

- Need: webcam, computer, internet access in place large enough to do SAFER (can be your home or office)
- Up to three dog to practice the assessment (your own dogs or those that are familiar)



# How does coaching work?

- Assess via webcam (Skype/Google+)
- Previously read guidebook, watched DVD, and handled 25 dogs
- You assess and receive live feedback (dialogue) with written follow-up



# Is coaching right for you?

- Brush-up after a workshop
- Polish handling skills before re-certification
- Were taught second hand
- Self-taught from guidebook and DVD
- Have done the assessment on 25 dogs
- Desire feedback to improve handling to become certified (free!)
- *Highly recommend watching this 4-part SAFER webinar series on ASPCApro.org first!*

# Remote SAFER Certification

- Same process described previously (3 dogs, 3 worksheets) except:
  - » Done live/real time
  - » Need webcam, computer, good internet connection in assessment room
  - » Worksheets faxed/emailed after session
  - » Notified within 1-2 days after session



# Remote SAFER Certification

- Differs from coaching:
  - No dialogue or feedback given live
  - Need to be in the assessment room normally used
  - You and dogs are not familiar with each other



# Summary

- Discussed the history of SAFER certification
- Reviewed how to get certified
- Listened to two shelters' experiences with SAFER certification and their internal training program
- Outlined how to best prepare for certification submission
- Learned about SAFER coaching sessions as a new support tool



**ASPCA**pro.org/**SAFER**

For questions regarding SAFER, certification,  
or coaching please email:

**safer@aspca.org**

# Related ASPCApro Webinars

[www.aspcapro.org/webinars](http://www.aspcapro.org/webinars)

- **Identifying and Managing Food Guarding In Shelter Dogs** (Jan 17)
- **Enrichment for Shelter Dogs** (Jan 29)

Plus watch the recordings these two webinar series:

- **SAFER**
- **Canine Communications**