SAFER Canine Assessment Webinar Series

Part One
Canine Assessment: SAFER Overview and Research

Your Chat Moderators

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Related ASPCApro Webinars

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- ASPCA SAFER Equipment & Handling (12/05)
- Helping Adopted Dogs Adjust to New Homes (12/06) presented by author Patricia McConnell
- SAFER Canine Assessment: Scoring & Choice (12/12)
- Becoming a SAFER Certified Assessor (12/19)

Plus check out the Recordings in our Canine Communications webinar series

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SAFER Canine Assessment Webinar Series

Part One
Canine Assessment: SAFER Overview and Research

Emily Weiss, PhD, CAAB
Vice President of Shelter Research and Development
ASPCA
Overview

- What is an aggression assessment?
- Understanding probability
- Overview of SAFER
- The original research that “seeded” SAFER
- Other assessment research
- SAFER is just one piece of the behavioral profile

Identify Aggression

Aggression – encompasses a range of behaviors that usually begins with warnings and can culminate in an attack.

ASPCA SAFER™ (Safety Assessment to Evaluate Re-homing) identifies potential aggression
Why Was SAFER Developed?

The words we use matter......

**Temperament Test**
- Temperament is a mental or physical character that is regarded as innate, rather than learned.
- Test implies a pass/fail system

**Aggression Assessment**
- SAFER is an aggression assessment
- The outcome informs you about resources/support for the dog
ASPCA SAFER™ Assessment

Snapshot of current behavior with a narrow lens on aggression

Score (1-5) reveals:
• resources needed for placement
• probability of aggression

Probability

The chance that a given event will occur
• Rain, test scores, struck by lightening

No absolutes: 0-100%
Spectrum of behavior
SAFER and Probability of Biting

Dog 1

Assessed dog in shelter: "1 & 2"

0%

100%

Post-adoption:
behavior change due to environment
SAFER and Probability of Biting

Dog 2

Assessed dog in shelter: “3, 4 & 5”

0% → 100%

Post-adoption support lowers risk
ASPCA SAFER™

- Requires 2 people, 10 minutes, helper dog & video camera
- Probability of aggression: focus on body language
- Certification Process

ASPCA SAFER™

- 7 items (Look, Sensitivity, Tag, Squeeze, Food, Toy and Dog-to-Dog Approach)
  - Insight to response to a stranger looking at their face, touching collar, body, paws, how they respond when aroused, resource guarding issues & dog behavior when on-leash.
  - See videos of each item on ASPCApro.org/safer
Details of Scoring (Part 3 of this series)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>scoring:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dog lifts head and ceases eating when you reach to pull the bowl away or push him out. [Enter “1”]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dog calmly allows the food to be moved, follows the dish, but does not interfere with the dish’s movement. Dog’s body is soft and loose, eyes soft, tail neutral. He lifts his head when hand is pushed against his cheek. [Enter “1”]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dog follows the dish with his tail down, body likely a bit stiff. Dog lifts head after a bit of pressure from hand to cheek. [Enter “2”]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dog follows the dish, his tail between his legs, ears are forward. His body is stiff. Dog does not lift his head from the bowl when hand is applied to his cheek. [Enter “3”]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dog guips food, begins to eat faster and with bigger bites, body stiff. He does not lift head when hand is applied to cheek. [Enter “3”]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dog freezes and/or growls. [Enter “4”]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dog tries to bite. (Use chart on the worksheet to identify level of bite attempt/bite.) [Enter “5”]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Choice

- Give choice when assessing
  - Pulling head away during Look
  - Allowing movement on 6 ft leash during Tag
- Choice allows for accurate assessment
  - Limit choice=any dog aggress
- Upcoming webinar (Part 3 of SAFER series) will discuss choice in greater detail
Who can assess?

- Physically fit, ability to bend and kneel
- Knowledgeable in canine body language
- Ability to observe behavior changes objectively
- Awareness of your own body language and handling of leash

How is SAFER used?

Part of placement profile
- Adoption
- Rescue
- Foster

Intake tool
Prevention breed bans
Private consults

Any situation where you want to gather more info
Research

An endeavor to discover new or collate old facts by the scientific study of a subject or by a course of critical investigation.

Where did SAFER come from?

KHS: service dog selection tool: “seeds”
- 141 dogs at surrender: randomized 2 groups

Medical Exam

SAFER: 1&2's

66 dogs

75 dogs

Adoption
Research

Dogs moved to adoption
Phone survey 2 weeks post adoption
(n=92)
Standardized survey: focus on behavior

Adopted dogs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Assessed</th>
<th>No Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nipping</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Aggression</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toy Aggression</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growl at human</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>total</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>34</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Other results

- Of the dogs euthanized before adoption:
  - Heath: 8
  - Space: 7
  - Behavior: 12 (8 were not assessed)

- LOS (length of stay) is longer for dogs scoring 4 & 5 and shorter for dogs scoring 1 & 2

Publications


**Riverside County Dept of Animal Services (CA)**

100 dogs placed into adoption, 2 groups (assessed/not assessed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Assessed</th>
<th>Not Assessed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Growl at human</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bit Human</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bit Human/Broke skin</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Other Research**

**Rescue Waggin’ Transport Program**

- 14 source shelters brought ASPCA SAFER™ assessed dogs to Wisconsin Humane Society
- Re-assessed by certified staff (new location by different people 2-3 days after arrival)
- 3,000 dogs: scores varied by 3%
SAFER at Surrender

Wisconsin Humane Society

Dogs assessed at intake from owner in lobby

Conversation with owner

After intake, re-assessed dogs 2-3 days later

- 85% of 50 dogs re-assessed the same score

Other Research

Currently evaluating methods to use:

- toddler doll to assess arousal and aggression to children
- stuffed life-sized dog to determine level of dog aggression
Gather Information

Aggression assessment is just one piece of the puzzle to guide “live outcome”

The Assessment should be a platform to develop strategies to increase live release opportunities for each individual

Animal Control reports, surrender form, behavior team, other assessments, medical eval, staff & volunteer interactions, potential adopters, foster…

One example: Heidi

Call previous owner when necessary to gather more info.
Using SAFER

Outcomes will vary with staff, season, empty kennels, etc

Utilize other resources to increase live releases

- Foster
- Rescue
- Volunteer ambassadors

SAFER can increase live release!

- Decrease length of stay
- Decrease in euthanasia
- Decrease returns
- Increase adoptions
Summary

ASPCA SAFER™:
• Identifies potential aggression in dogs
• Informs a behavior modification plan & those moving to foster or rescue
• Facilitates transparency between for adopters and placing with rescue groups
• One piece of the puzzle that guides live outcomes for dogs

Get SAFER Certified!
• Ensures assessment is consistent and used as designed
• Learn more about certification and web-based SAFER coaching
• Attend the last webinar of this SAFER series on 12/19
For questions regarding SAFER, certification, or coaching please email:

safer@aspca.org

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