



Humane Society of Western Montana

Behavior Helpline

The Behavior Helpline (BHL) is a free resource that the HSWM provides for pet owners in Missoula and surrounding areas. The goal of the BHL is to provide training and behavior tips for pet owners to promote safe and positive relationships, and to keep pets in their home. The Behavior Manager oversees the BHL and assigns staff from the Behavior Team to respond to inquiries as part of their daily routine. This document gives instructions for checking and responding to BHL inquiries.

The BHL receives inquiries through these routes:

- The designated BHL number (406-549-9295) connects directly to the landline in the Training & Behavior office.
- The behavior email: behavior@myhswm.org.
- The HSWM website has links to BHL forms for both cats and dogs. Submitted forms are automatically sent to the behavior email.
- Any shelter staff may take a behavior message from a caller or a visitor and forward it to the Behavior Team. A behavior conversation may happen in person with a shelter visitor.

What is a BHL inquiry?

A BHL inquiry is any communication that is 5 minutes or longer and focuses on problem solving a challenge about pet behavior, and arises separately from the services HSWM typically offers.

Here are some examples of BHL communication:

- An adopter calls for advice to mitigate a problem behavior.
- A foster is having challenges with their foster pet.
- A former private lesson client calls with updates and has questions about their dog's behavior.
- A pet owner has behavior challenges with their pet.
- A training student stays after class to ask about a non-class related behavior.
- A staff member asks about their personal pet's behaviors.

Here are examples of non-BHL communication:

- Pre-adoption behavior consultations (these fall under our typical adoption services).
- A training student stays after class to go over class materials (this falls under our group training class services).
- An active private lesson client calls or emails updates and asks for feedback (this falls under our typical private lesson services).
- A potential adopter calls to ask about a shelter pet or other shelter programs.
- A staff member asks about shelter pet behaviors.

- A Behavior Team member goes over behavior modification protocol with staff members.

The BHL Process

The BHL is checked 7 days a week. Designated Behavior Team members check the BHL phone and email daily, and also respond to physical messages left by other staff members. Inquiries are responded to within 24 hours of receiving them.

- Phone - Behavior calls can be received during the shelter's open hours. If a Behavior Team member is not readily available, the caller will leave a message or another staff member can take a message and pass it to the Behavior Team.
 - When a voicemail message is pulled from the BHL phone line, it is erased from voicemail and the call is addressed within 24 hours.
- Email - When checking the behavior email, Behavior Team staff will forward a behavior inquiry or form to their designated work email and respond via their work email (ex. jane.doe@myHSWM.org). The original email is then archived within the behavior email account. This removes the inquiry from the general behavior inbox so there is no redundancy or miscommunication with other team members. It also keeps the behavior inbox clean.
- When a behavior call or email is conducted, the information is recorded in the "Behavior Helpline" sheet located on the "Behavior Drive."

Behavior Helpline sheet

All BHL communications are logged on the designated sheet on Behavior Drive. Information is recorded with the newest at the top. This form of record keeping makes communication efficient in these ways:

- Anyone can find conversation records, and rudimentary behavior information, from a repeat caller.
- Behavior Team members working different days can see if their colleagues left messages, they can continue conversations, and avoid redundancy.
- BHL information can easily be tracked for general operation purposes, data reporting, grant writing, etc.

Each BHL entry, or row, is a separate communication. A 1 hour conversation would be logged as one BHL call. But if the same caller calls three times in one day, it would be logged as three separate BHL calls.

Troubleshooting behavior inquiries

Behavior Team members are trained to have the knowledge to address common behavior challenges that occur in dogs and cats. Behavior Team members can seek help from other team members or the Behavior Manager if a conversation is outside of their skill or comfort zones. The BHL is an intake diversion tool, and the Behavior Team member should recommend solutions like management, group training classes, private lessons, calling a veterinarian, etc. If the caller still does not wish to keep their pet they may inquire about surrender options. Non-HSWM resources may be recommended, but all resources follow the HSWM Position Statement on Training Methods.