

Approach and Capture of Dogs

Our topics for this week are:

- **Approaching a strange dog**
- **Capture of a dog in an enclosure**
- **Recovering an escaped dog**

Greeting an unfamiliar dog should NOT involve a direct confrontation, leaning over the dog, patting on top of the dog's head, thrusting a hand with outstretched fingers in front of it, high squeaky voices, or direct stares.

Whenever possible, handlers should allow a dog the opportunity to approach and be caught rather than the handler approaching a dog to catch it. If the owner is present, the handler should first speak with the owner and initially ignore the dog. This allows the dog to assess the handler's voice, body language, and acceptance by its owner.

The dog's attitude should be observed to determine if it appears friendly and calm (typical of most companion dogs); friendly and fearful, fearful and reclusive or aggressive, or dominance aggressive. The handler should avoid a fixed stare or staring at the dog's eyes. A normal quiet managed tone with reassurance should be used. The dog should be called by its name, if known, when speaking to it. A quiet, cheerful tone should be used, and an overly excited, partytime voice should be avoided.

Dogs should not be approached or attempted to be caught in a small confined space. In a relatively open area, the dog should only be approached up to the edge of the dog's personal space zone (usually about 3 feet). The handler then should stand sideways or crouch with his side to the dog and give it a chance to more easily approach submissively. If the dog is large and potentially aggressive, the handler should be positioned so that he can stand immediately and move, if needed.

Food treats may be held out at the level of the dog's head or tossed near the dog to entice it to approach. The treat should be small and easily consumed in a couple of seconds. Dry dog food treats that are easily stored in a pocket and will not spoil are best. However, some handlers prefer to use pieces of boiled hot dog, dried shrimp, or canned cheese spread. Constant praise should not be used for the dog's approach. Praise should be metered out and appropriate to each stage of the behavior to be effective.

After the dog has approached the handler, the handler should offer the back of his hand with his fingers curled for the dog to sniff. The hand should be offered at the level of the dog's head, or lower. A possibly fearful or otherwise aggressive dog should never be approached by

offering a hand with extended fingers to smell. If the dog's body is relaxed and the dog sniffs or licks the hand, it can then be stroked on the jaw or side of the face. Petting should not be initially directed toward the top of the dog's head or shoulders, and the dog should not be leaned over. The rest of the dog's body should be gently stroked from the neck toward the hips before attempting to move or lift it.

Once the dog tolerates being petted, a slip leash should be placed over its head and around its neck. When possible, the leash loop should go around the neck and one front leg on small dogs. Large dogs can be led and small dogs are usually picked up. If an owner is present, he should first be asked if the dog is known to be painful anywhere before the dog is picked up. The slip leash is gently pulled forward and upward for head restraint while the other hand reaches under the dog and supports its body to be picked up. The hand with the leash can then be moved to the dog's neck to aid in support and loose control of the head.

If there is more than one dog, the dominant dog should be addressed first and control of it established before proceeding to other dogs. Most companion dogs know the command to sit. If the dog is fearful or overtly aggressive, it should be given the command to "sit." Whether it complies or not, can be an indicator of its continued apprehension or aggression and the need for greater physical restraint methods or for chemical restraint. Large potentially dangerous dogs should never be handled by one handler alone.

Some dogs, particularly retrievers, herding dogs, guard dogs, are more aggressive or defensive when the owner is nearby. Other dogs, such as terriers, may be more difficult to handle when the owner is gone. If a dog has a history of biting or obviously is aggressive, an owner, or any other nonprofessional handler, should not assist in the dog's capture or restraint.

Exiting an Enclosure

When removing a dog from an enclosure, a slip leash should be applied to the dog while it is still in the cage or run, even if it is small and will be carried. Applying the leash can be done by opening the cage or run door just wide enough to insert an arm with the leash and slip it over the dog's head. If capturing a dog in a run, the handler can carefully enter the run and apply the slip leash if an assistant can hold the run door closed after the handler enters and open it when needed.

Recovering Escaped Small Animals

When attempting to recover escaped dogs and their whereabouts are unknown, animal shelters and veterinary clinics should be contacted. If you are not the owner, the owner should also be notified.

Escaped dogs that are located should not be chased. Dogs, if well socialized, may come to a familiar handler. The handler should slowly approach the animal. At a nonthreatening distance the handler lowers his body and calmly calls the animal. Offering food treats, if

available, can be helpful. If the animal approaches, the handler should attempt to pet the animal for 20-30 seconds before putting a leash on it or picking it up. The handler should not lunge at the animal or attempt to snatch it with his hands.

Another approach that can be effective is to put the escaped dog's crate with the door open and treats inside in a garage or shed and leave a people door open, not the overhead sliding door for vehicles. Optionally or additionally, a preferred animal associate (buddy animal) can be placed in a nearby closed cage in the garage or shed. This can allow trapping the escaped animal in the garage or shed by closing the door at the opportune time and then capture in the animal directly or after it is in its cage.

If you have comments or you're interested in particular animal handling subjects, contact us at CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com

Now let's recap the key points to remember from today's episode:

- 1. Do not lean over a strange dog and try to pat it on its head.**
- 2. Use small treats to entice a dog to approach you rather than you approach it,**
- 3. A slip leash is essential in approach and capture of a dog in an enclosure.**

More information on animal handling can be found in my books, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, *Concise Textbook of Small Animal Handling*, and *Concise Textbook of Large Animal Handling* all published by CRC Press and available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Additional information is provided at: www.betteranimalhandling.com . This website has more than 300 past podcasts with notes on handling of dogs, cats, other small mammals, birds, reptiles, horses, cattle, small ruminants, swine, and poultry.

Don't forget, serious injury or death can result from handling and restraining some animals. Safe and effective handling and restraint requires experience and continual practice. Acquisition of the needed skills should be under the supervision of an experienced animal handler.