

Approaching and Catching Dogs

Our topics for this week are:

- Approaching and catching companion and working dogs
- Approaching Service Dogs

APPROACHING AND CATCHING

Companion and Working Dogs

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. 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.

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.

Capture of an escaped dog should not involve chasing it. Once located, the dog should be approached slowly to the closest distance that does not appear to threaten the dog. The handler should kneel, speak calmly, and offer small food treats until it approaches and permits petting. Having a friendly dog on a leash accompany the handler can be an added lure when attempting to capture an escaped dog.

Service Dogs

Service dogs, as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), are dogs that have been trained to assist people with disabilities. A properly selected and trained service dog can be of great help to people with a loss of sight, hearing, or mobility.

They can also aid some people with seizures, autism, and other disabilities, but a true service dog is a working animal, not a companion pet whose presence is only for owner comfort or convenience. Unfortunately, in the U.S. no certification of training of service dogs is required by the ADA. Some certifications offered to people wishing to claim a dog (or other animal) as a service animal does not verify any professional training having been done on the dog or skills acquired from training. The training may range from well established program training, such that of the Seeing Eye Inc., or individual (owner) claimed training without verification of the training.

Psychologists who certify animals as "emotional support animals" do so without recognition of the Americans with Disability Act. Mental health professionals also could face legal ramifications for such actions because of the lack of scientific guidelines and the risk of the animal causing disease or injury to others. Possible cases of true emotional support animals should be certified by a forensic psychologist who are capable of providing legal defense service, if needed.

When approaching a service dog in a harness or on a leash, it is working and should not be distracted. It should not be talked to, except by the owner, or petted, except by the owner. The owner should not be distracted. Discussion with the owner must wait until he or she appears free to talk. The dog should not be offered treats or snacks by anyone other than the owner.

Service dogs are not required by the ADA to wear a vest or ID tags. The ADA only permits two questions to be asked of an owner of a possible service dog:

- (1) is the dog required because of a disability? and
- (2) what assistance has the dog been trained to do?

Questions may not be asked of the person's type of disability or for the dog to demonstrate its ability to assist. Documentation of a person's disability or the training of the dog has received cannot be requested.

Assistance animals are a broader definition and do not necessarily fall under the ADA, although in the U.S., service dogs may be referred to as assistance dogs. Most other countries maintain a clear distinction between the designations of a service dog and an assistance dog. Also, owner training of service dogs is not permitted in some other countries. Since there is no federal oversight on certification of service animals, abuse of the special allowances given to service animals is currently common in the U.S.

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

- Crouching position by a handler is inviting to unfamiliar dogs
- Bending over dogs, attempting to pet the top of a dog's head, holding outstretched fingers in front of a dog, or speaking in a squeaky, high pitched voice is threatening to dogs.
- Service dogs are professionally trained to perform an act of assistance for the owner, while emotional support dogs are not.

More information on animal handling is available in my book, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint* published by CRC Press. It is also available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Additional information is available at www.betteranimalhandling.com

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.