

These articles are from the PEPPERTREE RESCUE TRAINING SESSION 1, held January 16, 1999, in Albany. Patti Conroy gave the seminar, "CANINE BEHAVIOR ASSESSMENTS...."a better way?"

This series of articles are based on her PROGRAM HANDOUT CONTENTS and cover:

SHELTER TEMPERAMENT TEST

``A Better Way?"

STATEMENT

There is little more than a small index card or comment card on the crates and kennels of the dogs dropped off at your local shelters. The shelter's attendees may have gotten to know the dogs a little or they may be newcomers. You as the "interviewer" have nothing to go on but experience and gut instinct, both of which are invaluable. Many of the cards of aggressive or fear-biting dogs have a card that states ``owner moving" Below is a program you may find as a useful tool or indicator of sorts, helping even more in the selection of an appropriate canine adoption candidate.

If you are selecting a pure bred dog or pure bred mix, make a mental note regarding several things...just because the coat is golden, does not mean that this "golden retriever-type" candidate is an appropriate adoption candidate. Pay attention to other details...such as with a golden mix...are the ears pricked or are they floppy ears? Does the tail hang down like a saber or is it curled over the back? Does this golden mix have a black saddle or dark markings on the face? These are just a few of the details you should be looking for in the candidate. Is the coat a double coat or single? In other words, try to pinpoint what the "mix" part of the dog is. **DO NOT RELY ON THE CARD!**

Make your own judgement. Once you have done that, be aware of the temperament of

the "mix" part of that dog. The same goes for rescue clubs of other breeds. If you are attempting to rescue Siberian Huskies or Siberian Mixes, just because the dog looks like a Siberian Husky or looks similar, does not mean that it might not act like the shepherd mix that it really may be. It may be much more German shepherd than husky, and the utmost respect should be given to that part of the animal. Many adoption "mismatches" are made due to negligence in this area.

Now that you, in your own mind, feel somewhat comfortable with the heritage of this breed or mix breed candidate, there are other things that you should do before ever taking that dog out of his or her kennel for a "walk" outside.

Always take to the shelter with you several items...a tennis ball or rubber ball; a white sock or white hand towel, with a knot in the middle or a knot at each end and in the middle; and a short stick, approximately 12" long (a ruler will do).

Walk down and back slowly glancing at each dog while you are bouncing the ball. Watch all dogs react as you do this. Most will be barking, some wildly. Make a mental note of the candidates that **DO NOT BARK**. This can be a negative reaction, or a fearful one. Those candidates are not eliminated, but a mental note should be made (or written down immediately). At the same time, when all are "stimulated" by your walking slowly bouncing the ball, watch the interaction between the dogs...and make a mental note of the dogs that get aggressive towards each other during the excitement.

Next take your sock or towel and walk slowly down and back in front of the rows of kennels, and swinging the sock/towel around in a circle or hitting it against your hand. Your walk should be closer this time to the kennels but with your side facing the dogs. Watch out of the side of your eye all of the dogs reactions, particularly of course, the candidate(s) you are interested in rescuing. Play close attention to the dogs that appear excited, happy with tails wagging, and don't worry about the barking. This is a positive response. Also play close attention to the dogs that do not bark or stay behind in the background. Not eliminated still, but take heed. Also pay attention to the dogs that when stimulated have an aggressive tone in their bark. Immediately eliminate any dog that attacks the kennel gate, unless you are prepared to take that dog directly to the vets to be euthanized humanly. Next take your stick, and do the same a little closer, still making mental notes on reactions. Note dorsal hair raising...hair raised between shoulder blades equals fear. Hair raised all the way down the back to croup = aggression. Dilated pupils = aggression. Here, at a shelter setting...fear is much better to deal with than aggression. Fears are curable. Some aggressions are not!

Finally, you should be forming an opinion already regarding your candidate or candidates. Once you have eliminated a dog in your mind, leave it eliminated. Don't talk yourself into going back and giving it another chance. Your first hunch will always be your best opinion. Walk slowly towards the candidate that you are considering taking from the shelter and squat near its kennel with your side facing the dog, not looking at the dog. Start talking in a sweet, calm tone and slowly turn your eyes towards the dog. Your goal is to end up facing the dog, looking into its eyes and talking to the dog with the dog giving a mentally healthy and happy response to see you and be close to you. Eliminate a dog that you cannot look directly into its eyes. Any animal that you stare at for a moment that hits the kennel gate with an aggressive attack manner should be eliminated immediately from consideration. If you receive a fear-type response, give it time. Stay with you side to the dog for a longer period of time. You may walk towards the dog in a semi-circle instead of directly towards the dog in a straight line, and then squat down sideways and talk to him or her. The response with a fearful dog may then be much more positive. Dogs that have passed these tests will be good candidates to take outside for a walk.

As you are taking your candidate outside, walk your candidate down the row of other dogs and watch your candidate's reaction to the barking dogs. Take heed if he or she wants to attack another dog from "outside" the kennel. Walk your candidate past the cat crates if you can on your way out and observe its reactions to the cats. Make a mental note of this. Outside, give your candidate a few obedience commands, such as sit...and stay...and/or down. Bring your ball or sock/towel and see if your candidate knows how to play.

Then, LET YOUR GUT AND INSTINCT HELP YOU MAKE YOUR FINAL DECISION.

SUMMARY - Shelter Check List

Make a mental note of what breed may be "mixed" with your adoption candidate: (Coat type/length-ear style-tail style-coat color/markings, foot type, etc.)

Understand that floppy ears, saber tails, and double coat = probable sporting breed

Understand that prick ears, curled tail over back, double coat = working/herding breed Understand that very short coat, heavy muzzle, med. to long ears can = hound type

Understand that wiry coat, natural mustache, heavy brows med. dog = terrier type

In other words, truly get a feel for the breed or "breeds" you have in one package.

Then...

Walk down in front of the kennels and back slowly bouncing a ball. Mental Notes.

Walk down in front of the kennels and back slowly swinging towel/sock. Mental Notes.

Walk down in front of the kennels and back closer with the stick... Mental Notes.

Walk towards your selected candidate and slide down squatting in front of kennel with side towards candidate and talk calmly and sweetly to the dog.

Turn head and body towards the dog while talking calmly and sweetly and look the candidate directly into its eyes. . . (not necessary to STARE) and make mental notes.

If your candidate "passes" the above, take it outside, but make mental notes on the candidate's reactions while passing other dogs and passing cat crates. See if your candidate knows any obedience or house manner "commands" such as sit, stay and down.

Jot down your "mental notes" on paper before leaving with your selected rescue dog. Add any more comments to your written notes on the candidate after you have arrived at the vets or at the foster home, such as how he or she traveled in the car with you. Also, make written notes for that OTHER SPECIAL candidate that you had to leave behind but should be picked up ASAP by another person!

Special Note: Remember, the dog with "dominance aggression" can pass the above tests with flying colors. Their true disposition and illness does not show until they are COMFORTABLE and FAMILIAR with their new family. This is the exception to the rule. Dominance Aggression is a "wait-and-see" situation). But many times, dominantly aggressive dogs have other aggressive tendencies, so they sometimes can appear during the shelter testing.

These measures will not eliminate behavior problems, but they certainly will help to eliminate very poor adoption candidates chosen only because of their coat color or body type closely matching the pure bred or pure bred mix you are hopeful to rescue. GOOD LUCK!