

Managing Dogs that already have "One Strike"

Objective: Review the special accommodations/considerations necessary to incorporate a dog back into off-leash play that has been involved in an incident such as a scuffle or low level bite (see supporting documents for Bite Scale).

Content: Fur is flying, adrenaline is high, everyone is freaking out. These are common phrases heard when a scuffle in the play yard breaks out. It's perhaps one of the scariest things that can happen during off-leash play. Seconds seem like hours when a scuffle happens.

Every pet care center should have a formal system to evaluate incidents and determine if the dogs involved should be dismissed or not. If a dog is allowed to return to off-leash play, special considerations should be taken to ensure the safety of all of the dogs and humans in the center. This activity is designed to allow the team to discuss and determine appropriate steps for incorporating dogs that have "one strike" back into group play.

**The best scenario for successfully working a dog back into group play is an incident in which no dog or human was injured (classified on the bite scale as a Level 1 bite). Dogs with bites that are Level 3 and above are much more of a risk during off-leash play and should seriously be considered for dismissal from group play. This activity is not meant to assist in determining if a dog should return to group, only how to handle the dog once the decision has been made.*

Prior to Lunch & Learn Session:

- In preparation for leading the group discussion, the leader should review the supporting document section to determine what information will be presented.
- Print Ian Dunbar's Bite Scale to utilize for reference in your center.
- Print the scenarios if you plan to utilize them during the activity.
- Add or remove information that you feel is critical to proper management of "one strike dogs."
- Have a white board or other way to document notes.

During Lunch & Learn Session:

- Open with your thoughts on why this topic is so important.
- Present a scenario to the team (we have provided a few if you need them).
    - Ask the team to provide suggestions on how you could safely incorporate the dog back into group play and how to manage the dog in the future.
    - Document ideas on a white board or note pad.
- After the team offers ideas, share the steps provided in the supporting documents that you found to be appropriate for your center.

* If you do not have a documented process in place for incorporating dogs back into off-leash play after an incident, this would be a great time to develop those with your team. Have the notetaker write the steps down so they can be added to your SOP Manual after the meeting.

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Supporting Education Articles/Tools: The information below provides additional guidance on the topic and should be reviewed prior to and during the meeting:

Dr. Ian Dunbar's Dog Bite Scale (Official Authorized Version)

An assessment of the severity of biting problems based on an objective evaluation of wound pathology

Level 1. Obnoxious or aggressive behavior but no skin-contact by teeth.

Level 2. Skin-contact by teeth but no skin-puncture. However, may be skin nicks (less than one tenth of an inch deep) and slight bleeding caused by forward or lateral movement of teeth against skin, but no vertical punctures.

Level 3. One to four punctures from a single bite with no puncture deeper than half the length of the dog's canine teeth. Maybe lacerations in a single direction, caused by victim pulling hand away, owner pulling dog away, or gravity (little dog jumps, bites and drops to floor).

Level 4. One to four punctures from a single bite with at least one puncture deeper than half the length of the dog's canine teeth. May also have deep bruising around the wound (dog held on for N seconds and bore down) or lacerations in both directions (dog held on and shook its head from side to side).

Level 5. Multiple-bite incident with at least two Level 4 bites or multiple-attack incident with at least one Level 4 bite in each.

Level 6. Victim dead.

The above list concerns unpleasant behavior and so, to add perspective:

Levels 1 and **2** comprise well over 99% of dog incidents. The dog is certainly not dangerous and more likely to be fearful, rambunctious, or out of control. Wonderful prognosis. Quickly resolve the problem with basic training (control) — especially oodles of Classical Conditioning, numerous repetitive Retreat n' Treat, Come/Sit/Food Reward and Back-up/Approach/Food Reward sequences, progressive desensitization handling exercises, plus numerous bite-inhibition exercises and games. Hand feed only until resolved; do NOT waste potential food rewards by feeding from a bowl.

Level 3: Prognosis is fair to good, provided that you have owner compliance. However, treatment is both time-consuming and not without danger. Rigorous bite-inhibition exercises are essential.

Levels 4: The dog has insufficient bite inhibition and is very dangerous. Prognosis is poor because of the difficulty and danger of trying to teach bite inhibition to an adult hard-biting dog and because absolute owner-compliance is rare. Only work with the dog in exceptional circumstances, e.g., the owner is a dog professional and has sworn 100% compliance. Make sure the owner signs a form in triplicate stating that they understand and take full responsibility that: 1. The dog is a Level 4 biter and is likely to cause an equivalent amount of damage WHEN it bites again (which it most probably will) and should therefore, be confined to the home at all times and only allowed contact with adult owners. 2. Whenever, children or guests visit the house, the dog should be confined to a single locked-room or roofed, chain-link run with the only keys kept on a chain around the neck of each adult owner (to prevent children or guests entering the dog's confinement area.) 3. The dog is muzzled before leaving the house and only leaves the house for visits to a veterinary clinic. 4. The incidents have all been reported to the relevant authorities — animal control or police. Give the owners one copy, keep one copy for your files and give one copy to the dog's veterinarian.

Level 5 and **6**: The dog is extremely dangerous and mutilates. The dog is simply not safe around people. I recommend euthanasia because the quality of life is so poor for dogs that have to live out their lives in solitary confinement.

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Scenarios

Scenario 1:
Shelby, a nine-year-old male chow mix that has been attending daycare for five years without incident lashes out when Dover, a 7-month-old male German Shepherd bumps into him running from another adolescent dog. Dover has a nick on the ear that receives first aid treatment. How should Shelby be handled in the future?

Scenario 2:
Prince is an adolescent dog that loves to play. He is a friendly guy but can get overwhelming even for the most rambunctious play mates. Play quickly escalates numerous times per day and he is making the newer team members nervous. Discuss how Prince can be handled in the future.

Scenario 3:
Kona, a two-year-old, female chocolate Labrador that was evaluated last week is attending her third half-day of daycare. Roger is a new employee that started two weeks ago and is assigned the responsibility of walking dogs arriving to the daycare playgroup. When Roger reaches to unbuckle Kona's collar she snaps and inflicts a level 2-bite on Roger's hand. What next?

Scenario 4:
Poncho, a huge and happy-go-lucky boxer mix that gets little to no exercise at home gets super excited to join play group each morning. His arrival initiates very high arousal levels every morning and stresses the staff out. On his way into the yard one morning, Poncho barrels into the play yard and runs full speed into an employee filling water bowls. The employee's knee buckles and she has to leave early for the day. What is next for Poncho?

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Suggestions for Management

Possible steps for managing dogs with "one strike." Every pet care center is different and will need to determine the safest way to incorporate dogs back into play group after an incident. This list offers a few suggestions to get you started.

1. Utilize the Dog Incident Checklist available from The Dog Gurus to determine if the dog should be dismissed.
2. If a bite occurred during a fight or scuffle, reference Ian Dunbar's bite scale to determine if group play is still appropriate based on the bite level.
3. Ensure all staff members are comfortable with the dog returning.
4. Put the dog through your evaluation process again to determine if group play is still appropriate for this dog.
5. Document a plan for the days and weeks following the incident.
6. Coach employees on how to manage the dog in group play. Every incident from your center should have a lesson learned. Why did the incident happen and how could it be avoided in the future? This information should be shared with each team member that manages the dogs.
7. Have the dog return on a quieter, lower occupancy day where there will be less energy and arousal in the play yard.
8. Start with individual activities, or one on one play for the initial visit or two.
9. Limit play time and provide the dog proper rest.
10. Monitor play closely for escalating behaviors that could indicate they are at increased safety risk.
11. Interact and engage with the dogs to keep arousal levels moderated.
12. Staff the play yard with senior play yard staff during initial sessions.
13. Keep pet parent informed with open and honest communication. Make suggestions on what they can work on at home.
14. Be prepared to dismiss if the dog exhibits a high level of yellow behaviors or if the team is not comfortable with managing the dog.
15. **Add other special considerations that are appropriate in your center to keep all dogs safe and comfortable during this process.**

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