



# **BELCONNEN DOG OBEDIENCE CLUB**

## **Reactive Dog Policy**

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### **VERSION CONTROL**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Version</b>	<b>Modified By</b>	<b>Comments</b>
06/07/2018	1.0	Lyndal Hasselman Margo Hellyer	Initial version

## **1. DOCUMENT PURPOSE**

To set guidelines on managing reactive dogs, reducing the risk of incidents and responding to incidents on BDOC club grounds for the safety and wellbeing of all club members.

## **2. DOCUMENT SCOPE**

- 2.1 This policy applies to all volunteers (including Committee members, office and shop volunteers, instructors and assistant instructors) and club members on club grounds. Club members include dog handlers in Companion Classes and in dog sports including but not limited to Agility, Flyball, Obedience, Rally Obedience, Dances with Dogs, Nosework and Disc Dog.
- 2.2 All trials hosted by Belconnen Dog Obedience Club are conducted under the ANKC, Dogs ACT and respective dog sport governing body policies and Rules, which includes incident management. During trials hosted by Belconnen Dog Obedience Club, the ANKC, Dogs ACT or respective dog sport governing body policies takes precedence to this club policy. Any incident involving a BDOC member and their dog at a trial hosted by BDOC may also be recorded on the club's records for that dog.
- 2.3 This policy describes the organization's objectives and policies regarding the management of reactive dogs and response to incidents.
- 2.4 A reactive dog for the purposes of this policy is any dog that responds to some stimulus and in doing so becomes over aroused and over threshold. In this state the dog may cause stress or harm to another dog or person and the dog is no longer in an appropriate condition for constructive training. The state of arousal and over threshold may be identified by more obvious behaviours such as growling, barking or lunging on a lead (see Appendix 2). It may also be indicated by a refusal to take high value treats from its handler. The underlying cause may be anxiety, fear, excitement or aggression. This policy applies to all reactive dogs and dogs involved in an incident, regardless of the underlying cause.

- 2.5 An incident is any situation when the dog's behaviours are aggressive towards another dog, handler, or another person. This can range in severity from a dog growling at person, an instructor, nipping at shoes or trousers, through to a bite.

### **3. RESPONSIBILITIES**

- 3.1 BDOC Committee carries ultimate responsible for decision making concerning dog incidences.
- 3.2 One member of the BDOC Committee will be appointed to the role of "Incident Manager" each year. This person shall be supported by a second BDOC Committee member appointed to the role of "Assistant Incident Manager". It will be the responsibility of the Incident Manager and Assistant Incident Manager to:
- 3.2.1 Promote the application of this policy by all club members;
  - 3.2.2 Lead any revision required to this policy; and
  - 3.2.3 Review all incidents and put recommendations forward to the BDOC Committee.
- 3.3 As required, either as triggered by an incident or in preventative action, the Incident Manager will convene an "Incident Committee". This committee will comprise of at least 3 individuals, including a representative from the dog sport or activity to which the specific matter relates.
- 3.4 The Incident Manager, or if delegated, the Assistant Incident Manager, is responsible for coordinating the Incident Committee, including the distribution of incident reports and tabling of recommendations to the BDOC Committee.
- 3.5 Instructors are responsible for informing the Incident Manager and Assistant Incident Manager via written reports of incidents. Any reports received by the BDOC committee are to be redirected to the Incident Manager and Assistant Incident Manager for review.
- 3.6 Assistant instructors may provide additional information on incidents.
- 3.7 Instructors retain the right to refuse inclusion of a dog and/or handler in their class. Any instructor that is not comfortable with a reactive dog or handler in their class should advise their sport or activity's committee representative or the Incident Manager. The committee representative must assess the situation and may re-allocate the dog to another instructor and/or refer the matter to the Incident Manager.
- 3.8 All members must declare any unwanted/reactive behaviours (anxiety, fear, over excitement or aggression) and any previous incidents in which the dog has been involved on application to the club and membership renewal. If a member or prospective member is uncertain of the dog's suitability for the club environment they can request an interview with the Incident Manager or Assistant Incident Manager.

- 3.9 All members are to proactively manage the behaviours of their dog/s, contributing to the safety of the BDOC grounds for other members and their dogs. This includes managing distances between dogs, following all Club rules, and responding to the directions of instructors at all times.
- 3.10 All BDOC members are required to abide by club rules and policy as a condition of membership. New members must sign acknowledgement that that the club rules have been sighted and will be adhered to.

## **4. INCIDENT PREVENTION**

- 4.1 All dogs joining BDOC over 6 months of age must complete a dog profile form. This should be done at least one week prior to week 1 of their first session.
- 4.2 At least one member of the Canine Companion sub-committee will review each dog profile form.
- 4.3 Instructors taking beginners classes are also required to read the dog profile forms prior to week 2 of their first session. Instructors should adjust the layout of their classes (e.g. spacing, positioning of dogs, use of visual barriers) as informed by the behaviours detailed on the dog profile forms.
- 4.4 Any dog profile form that indicates a higher level of existing behavioural problems, reactivity or (non-play) bite history may trigger a review of suitability to the BDOC environment. This may involve an interview with the handler and dog on the grounds prior to class starting, at a time when there are no other dogs in the vicinity. If this is required, this will be organised by the club secretary in conjunction with the Incident Manager. The interview may be conducted by an experienced instructor, as delegated by the Incident Manager.
- 4.5 If, following the interview and preliminary on-site assessment of reactivity thresholds, the dog is found to be too reactive for a class situation, the membership fees will be refunded. A small administration fee may be applied.
- 4.6 If it is considered likely that the dog will settle into the class environment and thresholds can be managed with successful counter conditioning, then the handler and dog may be asked to wear a yellow bandana on club grounds. This signifies to others that the dog and handler need additional space.

## **5. MINIMISING RISK DURING BDOC ACTIVITIES**

- 5.1 In accordance with the club rules and policy all handlers should be 12 years of age or over.
- 5.2 A dog that is assessed as being reactive or potentially reactive requires a handler over 18 years. Exceptions can be requested through the Incident Manager, for consideration by the BDOC Committee.

- 5.3 The syllabus documents provide details on calming techniques, desensitization and counter-conditioning, and increasing distance from triggers.
- 5.4 Handlers should also ensure they have appropriate equipment fitted on their dogs, such as harness-to-collar attachments. Handlers should also ensure they grip the leash through the handle and/or have this affixed to reduce the risk of a dog becoming loose.
- 5.5 It is expected that reactive dogs will find the club environment stimulating, particularly in the first few weeks. However, all dogs should achieve sustained periods of calmer behaviours (e.g. not vocalizing, relaxed posture) and focus on their handler.
- 5.6 Prior to any incident occurring, a dog with sustained reactive behaviour (growling, barking, lunging) that cannot be focused back to its handler requires a Reactive Dog Report to be prepared by the class instructor and sent to the Incident Manager for assessment (Attachment B – Reactive Dog Report).
- 5.7 In some cases, based on the expression of reactive behaviours and in the absence of an incident, it may be necessary for an instructor to ask a handler to immediately remove the dog from the grounds, i.e., securing the dog in the car so that the situation can be calmly discussed. In such cases the instructor may need to provide assistance to ‘shepherd’ the reactive dog from the grounds, ensuring other dogs are kept at a manageable distance while the reactive dog is removed. These cases require reporting to the Incident Manager for assessment (Attachment B – Reactive Dog Report).
- 5.8 Following receipt of a Reactive Dog Report, based on the information provided, the Incident Committee may request that the handler and dog be:
  - 5.8.1 Provided with a yellow bandana;
  - 5.8.2 Cautioned about the suitability of the club environment and activities for the dog’s training and wellbeing;
  - 5.8.3 Advised to seek professional advice (and provided with local referrals);
  - 5.8.4 Provided with a management and monitoring plan (see Appendix I for an example); and/or
  - 5.8.5 Asked to withdraw from a/all training activities until BDOC is advised by a professional that the dog can have constructive training experiences at BDOC.
- 5.9 Should the Incident Committee consider that the dog should be withdrawn from training, the handler and dog will be immediately suspended from all BDOC activities until the case is reviewed by the BDOC Committee at the next regular committee meeting.
- 5.10 Following assessment by the Incident Committee, a note shall be placed on the dog’s file to ensure that conveners of any dog sport are aware of potential issues. The suitability of each dog and handler for commencing participation in an activity should be assessed on a case by case basis, and this is the responsibility of the BDOC Committee Representative.

- 5.11 Any written advice from a professional dog trainer, behaviourist or vet that indicates that the dog poses a risk to either dogs or humans and may not be suitable for participating in club activities will result in the dog being immediately suspended until a review can be completed.
- 5.12 In some cases, it may be advisable for the dog to wear a muzzle. This is only suitable for dogs that are generally under threshold and able to receive training. It is to be worn to provide the handler with confidence that the dog cannot harm another dog, reducing the unintended application of lead tension.
- 5.13 There are events during the year that pose higher risk. This includes week 1 of each session as dogs and handlers are waiting to be allocated classes, week 2 as this is the first week of all levels being in the paddock, assessment day/night when handlers and dogs are moving around more, and the Have a Go Day and Christmas Party. Instructors are to be aware of these higher risk events and provide support to handlers in managing distance (e.g. acknowledge the reactive dog, alert other handlers, and/or leaving the reactive dog to the side of the assessment ring until their turn or allow queue jumping).
- 5.14 There are several behaviours in the syllabus that are designed to reward calm behaviours (e.g. self-control passing other dogs, social greeting).
- 5.15 Recalls on lead and come to handler can result in handlers getting disoriented and distances being quickly reduced between dogs. Reactive dogs will require their own space for this exercise. Instructors should minimize the number of dogs in any class practicing these activities at the same time.
- 5.16 Harness fitting is also a higher risk activity. Instructors and shop volunteers are advised to check with handlers first as to the dog's willingness to be handled by a stranger. There is a tape measure in the shop for measuring dogs, and handlers should be able to do this themselves. It is also encouraged for handlers to be verbally guided in how to fit their dog's harness, providing them with ongoing skills.
- 5.17 Dog sports will assess suitability for participation in the respective dog sport activity. Most dog sports activities are conducted off-lead and so require strong and consistent recall capability for dogs so that all dog/handler teams can safely participate.
- 5.18 On a case-by-case basis, the suitability of the dog for participation in Nosework will be considered. The ability of the Nosework instructor to manage the dog's reactivity while minimizing risk to other handlers and dogs will be considered. This may limit the number of overly reactive dogs that can be trained in any one Nosework session.

## **6. INSTRUCTOR AND VOLUNTEER TRAINING**

- 6.1 The Incident Manager, Assistant Incident Manager and Canine Companion Representative will monitor instructor training needs for dealing with reactive dogs.
- 6.2 Guidance on how to handle reactive dogs in class is included in all instructor intake training.

- 6.3 Instructors are encouraged to refer handlers of reactive dogs to professional trainers or behaviourists (contact details are available in the office).
- 6.4 Additional training will be organised as required.
- 6.5 Optional first aid training will be organised for all instructors and volunteers every second year (or as required to maintain currency of certificate). BDOC is not responsible for the costs of such training.

## **7. HANDLING INCIDENTS**

- 7.1 An incident is any situation when the dog's behaviours are aggressive towards another dog or person. This can range in severity from a dog growling at a person or dog, nipping at shoes or trousers, through to a bite. These incidents ALL require reporting to the Incident Manager and Assistant Incident Manager.
- 7.2 Upon an incident, the distance between the dog and stimulus (dog or human) must be immediately increased. If necessary, a bucket of water can be used to startle dogs and pull them apart.
- 7.3 Other handlers and dogs in the vicinity are to commence calming and focus exercises with their dogs, increasing distance from the incident if necessary.
- 7.4 The instructor is to make an immediate assessment of the situation. The factors to consider include, but are not limited to:
  - 7.4.1 The activity leading up to the incident (on lead vs off lead work);
  - 7.4.2 The level of control demonstrated by the handler;
  - 7.4.3 The severity of the incident (contact with a dog/human, response of the other dog/human (e.g. retaliation, submission, avoidance), presence of saliva on the other dog/human, scratches, tooth marks or puncture wounds); and
  - 7.4.4 The ability of the instructor and the handler to control the environment adequately to prevent a further incident.
- 7.5 As directed by the instructor, the handler is to either calm the dog and re-gain its focus, or to remove the dog from the training grounds. Securing the dog in the car might be necessary for the handler and instructor to calmly discuss the situation. If the dog requires immediate removal from training, then the instructor is to also advise the handler that the dog is suspended from all club activities until the incident can be reviewed.
- 7.6 On conclusion of the training session, or at most within 24 hours, the instructor is to advise the office, sports representative or Incident Manager that an incident has occurred. The Incident Manager or the sports representative to the committee may immediately suspend a dog and handler from all club activities until the review is completed, with this suspension to be confirmed in writing as soon as practicable after the incident.

- 7.7 Any member observing an incident where a dog has or is acting in an aggressive manner towards a person or dog may report the incident to the BDOC Secretary.
- 7.8 The incident notification form, as provided in Attachment I, is to be provided to the Incident Manager within 1 week of the incident.
- 7.9 Assistant instructors may provide an additional report of the incident.
- 7.10 In severe cases, handlers that have witnessed an incident may be asked to provide a brief written report. A template is provided in Attachment I.
- 7.11 The handler/s of the reactive dog can also provide a written statement within 1 week of the incident.
- 7.12 The Incident Committee will review the information received and the filed record of incidents regarding both the handler and dog and will put a recommendation forward to the BDOC Committee.
- 7.13 Recommendations may include, but are not limited to:
- 7.13.1 A management and monitoring plan may be put in place (see Appendix I for an example);
  - 7.13.2 All out of hours access removed;
  - 7.13.3 Warning with clear criteria on the expected future behaviours and actions to be taken by the handler;
  - 7.13.4 Professional support (local recommendations to be provided);
  - 7.13.5 Suspension from any or all training activities until BDOC is advised by a professional that the dog can have constructive training experiences at BDOC (the handler and dog may be permitted to participate in Nosework classes only, under strict conditions); and/or
  - 7.13.6 Cancelling the membership for that dog or handler.
- 7.14 The final decision remains the responsibility of the BDOC Committee. The handler is to be provided the decision in writing within 2 weeks of the committee decision.
- 7.15 All dogs that have been reported to the Incident Manager will have a simple star placed or drawn on their Canine Companion training card, above the session in which the report has been made. This is to alert future instructors that there is a history of reactivity. It is the responsibility of instructors to follow this up and gain advice from either the Incident Manager or past instructors.

## **8. POLICY REVIEW**

- 8.1 This policy will be reviewed within 3 months of its commencement, and yearly thereafter.

## 9. REFERENCES

- 9.1 Dogs ACT Regulations section 17.1-17.6
- 9.2 Australian Flyball Association (AFA) June 2017
- 9.3 <http://careforreactivedogs.com/>
- 9.4 ACT Dangerous Dog Legislation  
[http://www.tccs.act.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/1193629/Dangerous-dog-legislation-fact-sheet.pdf](http://www.tccs.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/1193629/Dangerous-dog-legislation-fact-sheet.pdf)

# ATTACHMENT A – INCIDENT REPORT

Name of person submitting report: \_\_\_\_\_

Date and approximate time of incident: \_\_\_\_\_

**Role:**

Instructor       Assistant       Volunteer       Handler

**Activity:**

CC Beginners       CC Bronze       CC Silver       CC Gold

Agility       DWD       Disc Dogs       Flyball

Nosework       Rally Obedience       Trialing Obedience

Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**Name of handler and dog:**

Handler: \_\_\_\_\_

Dog: \_\_\_\_\_

**Assessment of incident**

Please indicate the severity of the incident with brief additional detail.

Severity	Details
No contact	
Contact observed but no physical evidence	
Saliva on dog or person	
Hair/fur pulled out	
Scratches or bruise	
Puncture wound or worse	





# APPENDIX I – SAMPLE MANAGEMENT AND MONITORING PLAN

## Name of handler and dog:

Handler: \_\_\_\_\_

Dog: \_\_\_\_\_

## Activity:

CC Beginners       CC Bronze       CC Silver       CC Gold

Agility       DWD       Disc Dogs       Flyball

Nosework       Rally Obedience       Trialing Obedience

Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

## Agreed actions to manage reactivity and minimize risk to other dogs and handlers:

- Yellow bandana
- Arriving early before class to settle dog and then waiting until after class, when paddock mostly clear before leaving
- Off lead training limited to single use paddocks and under supervision of instructor
- Muzzling dog while on club grounds. Muzzle to be an open-ended muzzle so that rapid treating is still possible.
- Proactively managing distance from other handlers/dogs (insert starting distance)
- Rewarding for calm behaviours, and use of 'Look at that'
- Parallel walking rather than passing other dogs

## Monitoring and Review

- Assessment in week 7 to determine progress and suitability of the club environment
- To be undertaken by the instructor and a member of the Incident Management sub-committee, or delegate
- By week 7 the distance thresholds are to be reduced from 5 metres to 3 metres. There is to be no expression of fear, anxiety, excitement or aggression with the dog able to look at the stimulus calmly, and also focus back to the handler.

## Signatures

Handler: \_\_\_\_\_

ISC Representative: \_\_\_\_\_

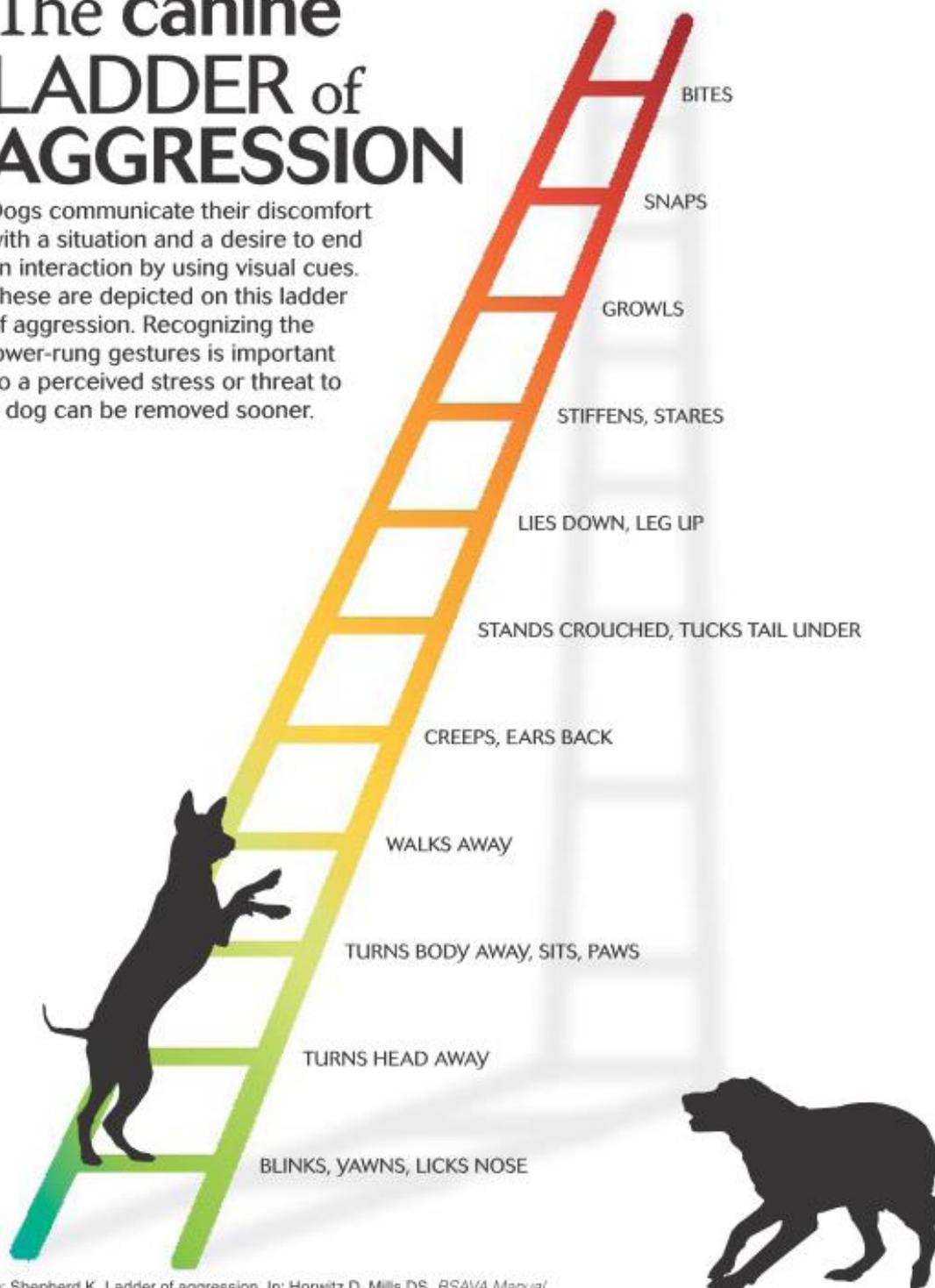
Instructor: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX 2 – EXAMPLE SIGNS OF REACTIVITY

# The canine LADDER of AGGRESSION

Dogs communicate their discomfort with a situation and a desire to end an interaction by using visual cues. These are depicted on this ladder of aggression. Recognizing the lower-rung gestures is important so a perceived stress or threat to a dog can be removed sooner.



Source: Shepherd K. Ladder of aggression. In: Horwitz D, Mills DS. *BSAVA Manual of Canine and Feline Behavioural Medicine*, 2nd ed. 2009.

# REACTIVITY CHART

WHEN DOG ENCOUNTERS A TRIGGER

