



Safety Tips for Dogs in Client's Homes

Introduction

The Winnipeg Regional Health Authority (WRHA) recognizes that the human animal bond is very strong and especially important to those individuals who require assistance in day-to-day life. The unconditional love that a pet gives can be a wonderful motivation and support. Having their pet with them, close to them, to calm fears and anxieties is very important to our clients. However, the WRHA also has a responsibility to provide a safe and healthy workplace for staff. The WRHA OESH Operational Procedure “Animals/Pets in the Client’s Environment/Home” was created to identify known and potential hazards to workers through the use of the **Safety Assessment Form Toll (SAFT)**, assess the risks, implement control measures to reduce or control these hazards, and communicate this information to staff through the **Safe Visit Plan (SVP)**.

Our staff are entering the client’s home routinely and the dogs are in their own environment. Some dogs are territorial and may feel that staff are invading their territory. In addition, many dogs are protective of their families and even a dog that has never shown aggression before may do so if they feel that a family member is being hurt when our staff are providing care. We have to remember that all dogs can bite, no matter what size or what breed. Some other hazards associated with animals/pets are: biting, tripping, aggressive behaviour, excited state, protective behaviour, jumping, scratching, and barking. In addition, some staff may have allergies or phobias/fears related to animals.

Be Aware of the Presence of Animals/Dogs

The completion of the SAFT and subsequent SVP (where required) should notify all staff of the presence of a dog in the client’s home and/or environment. However, staff should also be on the lookout for signs and warnings when approaching a yard that has or that you suspect may have a dog. These can include:

- Warning sign on fence or door
- Dog toys
- Dog House
- Feces
- Water Dish
- Rope or chain

There may even be a path worn in the yard where the dog constantly runs through (along the border of the fence) or even a gardening tool or kids toy that has been chewed on. It’s always safer to assume there is a dog in the yard and enter cautiously than to enter a yard and be startled by a once sleeping now awake dog.

Be Able to Recognize Signs of Aggression

There are numerous types of aggression you may face when encountering a dog and being able to tell the difference is very important. Here are the 5 main types of aggression that dogs present:

1. **Fear:** A fearful aggressor will not directly approach you but rather stay back and bark constantly or even run and hide. This type of aggressor will most often run up and attack once you turn your back on it as you provide care or leave the yard.
2. **Frustration:** When a dog is chained up or locked inside it may become frustrated at seeing someone enter the yard. In times like this a dog will continue to bark and lunge at the end of its chain to attempt to reach you. This results in them “scaring” you off their property.

3. **Territorial:** Since dogs are territorial by nature this is the most common type as to a dog you are invading their property and the dog aims to protect it. A friendly dog outside the fence might not be so friendly once you enter the yard but they may not immediately attack you. Sometimes they will just bark and try to push you out of the yard.
4. **Predatory:** Dogs are natural predators and any dogs under this category will not hesitate to attack anything that stimulates a chase response. These dogs are very confident, have solid nerves and will try to make you run so they can chase and attack. They will always charge you head on.
5. **Protective:** Dogs are also very protective of their families and even a dog that has never shown any aggression before can attack. An example for protective aggression is thinking you are hurting the client when providing care.

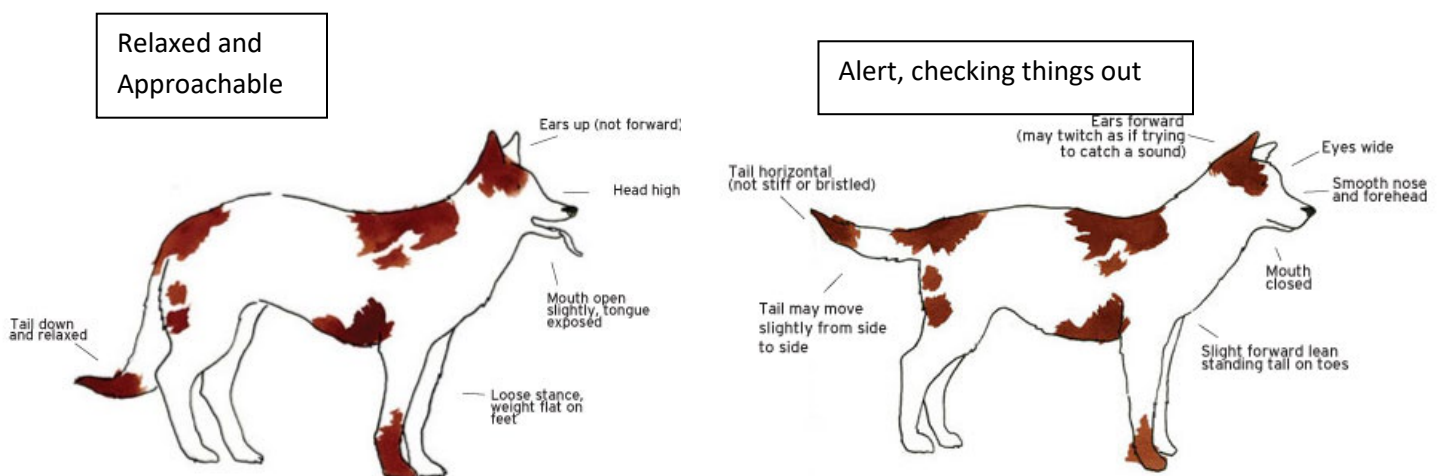
When you can't immediately tell if a dog is aggressive or not it's better to stay away from it and look for signs in their body language to help you determine if they are indeed aggressive.

Be Aware of Body Language

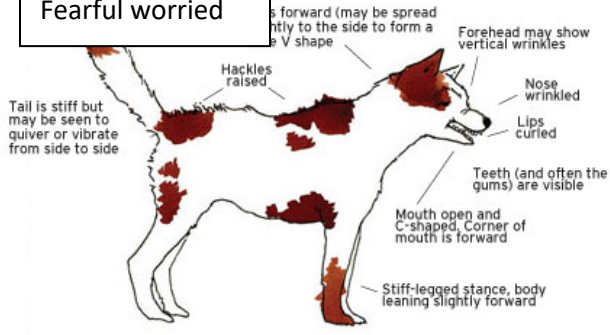
There are many ways to tell if a dog is aggressive or not and looking for these signs can help you. Remember, just because Fluffy's tail is wagging doesn't mean she wants to be your friend. Some of the important signs to pay attention to when encountering a dog are:

- Is the dog's body stiff and rigid and the dog not moving? Chances are the dog is sizing you up and waiting for you to make a move.
- Is the hair on its neck and back (hackles) standing up? This is a way for the dog to make itself appear bigger.
- Is the mouth closed with lips curled back? This is another clear sign of aggression. Some dogs may also yawn in a really exaggerated fashion when they are stressed about something they don't like.
- A fearful dog will generally have a hunched over body, lowered head, tail tucked between their legs, and avoid eye contact. This can signal the fearful aggressive type and the dog may attack when your back is turned.
- Sometimes a friendly dog may not even be wagging its tail, but instead sitting in a more neutral position panting with its tongue hanging out of the side of its mouth.
- Another sign of a friendly dog is along with the tail wagging, its whole body might be wagging and may even appear that the dog is "dancing" with excitement.

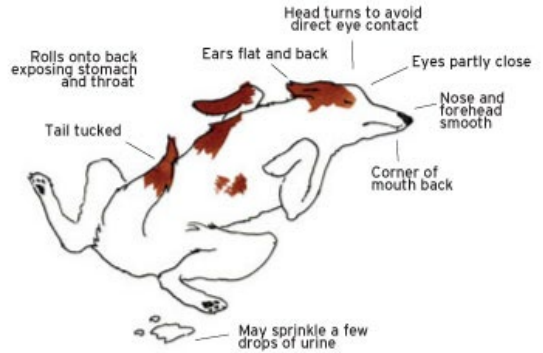
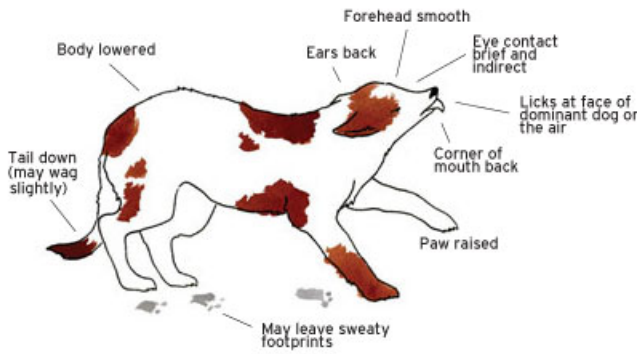
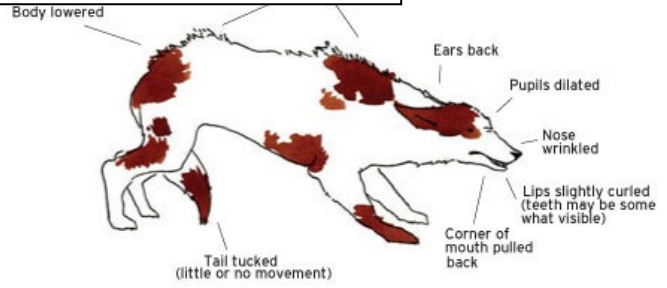
Here are some helpful illustrations to show the different types of body language you can see in dogs to help determine whether the dog is friendly or not.



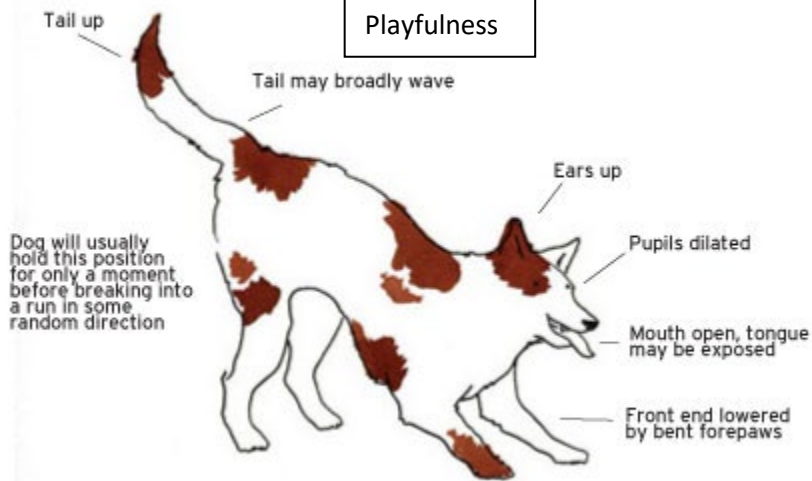
Fearful worried



Extreme fear, total submission



Playfulness



Safe Practices

There are a number of practices we can take to help reduce the chance of being attacked by a dog.

- Ensure the SAFT and SVP are up to date.
- Even if the SAFT or SVP do not mention a pet, this doesn't mean there isn't a dog on the property as someone may be visiting with their pet or the client may be dog sitting.
- If you are unsure about a dog on property whistle, rattle the gate or make some form of noise to alert the potential dog to your presence before entering.
- If you know there is a vicious dog on the property make sure you call the client prior to the visit to ensure that the dog has been isolated as outlined in the Safe Visit Plan.
- **Always** use your judgment for each new dog you see.
- Don't make sudden movements that might scare the dog into attacking out of fear. If the dog thinks you are there to play it can also make things easier for both of you.
- If you make noise and no dog comes to the gate, don't assume it is inside. It may just be sleeping, not quite paying attention or it was asleep and now it's awake and waiting for you to round the corner.
- When confronted by a dog that is showing aggressiveness **do not** run from it as that will entice the dog into a chase for attack.
- Stand your ground and don't make eye contact but don't look away either as the former is seen as a challenge and the latter is a sign of fear.
- Avoid sudden movements and loud noises and slowly back out of the yard/room.
- If the dog approaches you curiously stand your ground and let it sniff you but remain calm, the dog will leave you alone when it realizes you aren't a threat.
- If the dog begins to charge there are a few things you can do to defend yourself including waving your hat or throwing a ball (should one be near you). If you can't distract the dog a bag/purse or something of the sort can be used as a barrier while you remove yourself from the yard/room.
- Most dogs understand basic commands of sit, stay or go home and these can also be useful in helping you avoid a dangerous situation.

In case of Attack

If the dog gets your arm, don't yank away from it as that can cause tearing of the skin and make the injury worse. Instead, push into the dog hard, it won't hurt the dog but it will make it uncomfortable and it'll be more likely to let you go because you aren't struggling and this can result in a much less severe injury.

If you are knocked over **do not** flail and scream. Use your arms to protect your head and neck. If the dog is attacking the upper half of your body, use your legs to kick at the dog while you pull yourself out of the yard/room or until the dog leaves you alone. Curling up into a ball will also protect your vital parts and give the dog less body area to bite at and give you a better chance of the dog losing interest in you.

If in worst case scenario you need to use force to defend yourself there are some key spots you can strike a dog to stun it and give you a good chance of getting away. These spots include: chest, back of the head, between the shoulders, and along the ribs. Use caution when defending yourself as hitting a dog in the face for defense could end up making the dog angrier instead of making it back off.

Once you are safe, report the incident to your supervisor immediately and seek medical attention if necessary. Complete the Injury/Near Miss Reporting Process. Animal Services will be contacted. Dependent on the dog's immunization status, they may need to take the dog into quarantine to make sure it doesn't have rabies or something else that can be harmful to you.

Content based on City of Winnipeg document