



CANINE BEHAVIOR EVALUATION POLICIES

GENERAL:

1. Montgomery County Animal Services and Adoption Center (MCASAC) Behavior Evaluation Specialists perform canine behavior evaluations to consistently, reliably and objectively gather baseline behavioral information on individual dogs. Canine behavior evaluations provide information to help guide daily care, safety, rehoming, foster and/or rescue placement, and when necessary, decisions regarding humane euthanasia.
2. The results of a canine behavior evaluation indicate a stock of skills or types of observable behaviors the dog is accustomed to demonstrating (offering a general indication of a dog's reaction to a series of interactions). The evaluation is not a pass/fail handling test, but rather a series of interactions used to gauge an animal comfort level and coping skills.
3. A canine behavior evaluation may identify that a dog needs more than normal behavioral intervention while in the care of MCASAC. This may or may not preclude it from being a candidate for adoption, foster care, and/or transfer.
4. Placement decisions are not usually determined solely by the findings of a canine behavior evaluation, unless a significant risk to safety is identified. The results of a canine behavioral evaluation are reviewed by MCASAC staff and next steps are determined on a case by case basis, in conjunction with the animal's behavior at intake, during daily care and veterinary handling, and using information from previous owners, finders, or previous history with the Animal Services Division.

POLICIES:

1. Any dog that is property of MCASAC is eligible to be evaluated by Behavior Evaluation Specialists. Dogs will be evaluated during their stray hold period on an as needed basis. Seized dogs, dogs sheltered through the SafeKeep program, and dogs designated "Potentially Dangerous" or "Dangerous" will not be evaluated unless requested by the Director or Deputy Director.
2. Surrendered dogs are evaluated within 72 hours of entering the facility. Stray dogs may be evaluated during their 5-day stray wait period, or within 72 hours of their stray wait period expiring.
3. Dogs requiring veterinary care upon intake will be behaviorally evaluated within 72 hours after veterinary medical clearance. Dogs undergoing medical care will not be evaluated prior to being medically cleared by the attending veterinarian, unless veterinary staff or MCASAC leadership explicitly request an urgent canine behavior evaluation.
4. No dog may be made available for adoption or foster care placement without being behaviorally evaluated by, or with direct input from, a Behavior Evaluation Specialist, regardless of size, health, breed, or perceived temperament.
5. Dogs over six (6) months of age receive a full evaluation. Puppies between two (2) and six (6) months of age are only tested for resource guarding behavior. Canine evaluations are not performed on neonatal puppies.
6. Dogs with a body condition score of "2" or lower will not be evaluated for resource guarding tendencies until their body condition score reaches "3" or higher.

7. At the discretion of MCASAC staff, MCASAC may elect to forego a canine behavior evaluation if the dog has a known history of presenting a significant risk to human safety, or severe harm to other dogs or livestock.
8. For staff safety, when attempting to evaluate an individual animal, the assessor may cease their attempt to perform a full canine behavior assessment at that time when at least one of the following behaviors occurs during the assessment:
 - a. dog attempts to bite, or
 - b. dog gives multiple precursors to biting, or
 - c. dog appears to be terrified of an assessment item or is too shut down to accurately observe behavior.
9. Multiple attempts to perform a canine behavior evaluation may be made, if needed.

METHODOLOGY:

MCASAC evaluation draws from the research-based evaluation called ASPCA® SAFER™ (Safety Assessment for Evaluating Rehoming). SAFER™ is a seven item aggression assessment that identifies the dog's comfort level with restraint and touch, reaction to new experiences including movement and sound stimuli, bite inhibition, behavior around food and toys (resource guarding), and arousal level toward other dogs.* Also included in MCASAC's assessment is information on a dog's kennel presence, and sociability with both familiar and unfamiliar people. Additionally, Behavior Evaluation Specialists will use non-provocative interactions, such as office quiet-time or offsite outings, to gather additional information on an individual dog, as needed.

For more information on the ASPCA® SAFER™ evaluation, visit:
<http://aspcapro.org/sites/default/files/safer-guide-and-forms.pdf>

MCASAC evaluation assessment items are based on the ASPCA® SAFER™ but observations are not assigned a 1-5 score because MCASAC does not consider the evaluation to be a pass/fail test. However, behavioral responses that would score 4 or 5 in the SAFER™ manual are still understood as indicating a higher probability of dangerous behavior towards humans.

*Dog to dog assessments are not performed on every dog prior to adoption, however, they are performed on most dogs evaluated. Priority for dog to dog assessments go to dogs observed to be reactive toward other dogs during daily care, those reported to be dog-selective or aggressive by their owners, or dogs presenting other behavioral issues (such as high arousal or handling issues) that may either need play groups as an outlet, or whose dog skills would compound existing behavior problems.

LIMITATIONS:

1. The resource guarding portions of the SAFER™ evaluation utilize a fake human hand on a stick, called professionally within the industry an "Assess-a-Hand." Dogs may be frightened of the fake hand, or they may bite it as mistaking it for a toy. Behavior Evaluation Specialists may modify an evaluation based on reaction to the Assess-a-Hand.
2. The results of a one-time behavior evaluation are sometimes described as a "snapshot of an animal's behavior at a specific point and place in time." The best indication of an animal's behavior is multiple observations over an extended period, which is often not possible in a shelter environment.
3. False positives or negatives may occur due to the provocative nature of an evaluation setting and the inherent underlying stress of being in a shelter environment. MCASAC cannot guarantee to adopters and transfer partners that behaviors seen or not seen from a dog in care will manifest after its adoption or transfer, long- or short-term.