

# *Detroit Bully Corps*

## Canine Handling Rules and Procedures:

- Handle only one dog at a time.
- Choose a dog appropriate for your skill level. If the dog is walking you; the dog is too much for you to handle or you are not skilled for this size/type dog.
- Maintain control of the dog at all times. The dog you are handling has to be your number one focus.
- Do not handle a dog that makes you feel uncomfortable or nervous; the dog will know and will react accordingly!
- Before you remove a dog from a kennel, make sure that the leash you are about to use is in good repair and that you understand how to use it. Understand the use and purpose of each piece of equipment you use on a particular dog BEFORE using it on the dog. Always have a backup piece of equipment.
- When removing a dog from a kennel, carefully open the door and have a leash ready to slip over the dog's head and adjust as needed. Keep your voice soft and even.
- Always approach the dogs calmly and encourage them to be CALM and QUIET before you remove them from the kennel. This is also an opportunity for a training lesson, and what is reinforced right from the start will set the tone for the whole session, good or bad. Take your time, do it right.
- Do not allow dogs to jump up and/or play bite. Correct them calmly. Remember, we are preparing these dogs to go into homes of their own and need to reinforce good manners.
- Never hit, choke, kick, strike or scream at a dog. That is never appropriate!
- Never leave a dog unattended. Whether you are walking, bathing, or playing with a dog, you must be with the dog at all times. Do not turn the dog over to someone else, but take the dog back to the kennel yourself. Remember, when you take a dog out, you are responsible for that dog until you return it to the kennel.
- Any aggression must be reported immediately. Make careful note of ALL details of the incident, so it can be relayed and reported accurately, and appropriate analysis can be made by Corps Members. Sometimes a seemingly small factor can play a big part in determining the cause of a particular behavior.
- All visits with the dogs will be logged in their Training Log in a timely fashion.

### **How to "Read" Dogs**

Dogs are a multi-sensory species, in a different way than humans. A dog's first sense is their sense of smell, then hearing, then sight in most breeds of dogs. In the wild wolves live in packs, and have social hierarchy consisting of not only dominant (alpha) and submissive (omega) members, but also beta wolves lying in-between, frequently acting as peacemakers. This is a complicated hierarchy, in which biologists are working to further understand. Dogs are not wolves, and have been domesticated for some time now. Dogs are also smarter than most people give them credit for, and do understand that you are not a dog. Dogs also understand that they are not humans, although they will take your lead as to how you are asking them to behave, whether you mean to or not. But, the simple truth is that dogs will put you in their pack in whatever position you seem to fill best. You want to be at the top of this hierarchy. This is not because you are a human and thus, you

deserve to be at the top. Human or not, that spot has to be earned. The fact is that you NEED to be at the top, for the health, welfare, and safety of your dog. We brought our dogs into our lives, and it is a life that revolves around a human society that is often unfriendly to dogs, and human rules that usually make no sense to a dog and go against what would come naturally to them. It is up to US, the humans, to guide them through this often scary and confusing world. With rescue dogs, this becomes even more vital, as most have a past with unsavory treatment and contact with people. Dogs are very smart, and naturally want to please and do the right thing. Therefore, it is also up to us to learn how to best help them understand what it is we want of them. Yes, I do mean that it is up to us humans to better learn how to "speak dog." If we expect them to learn human words like "sit" and "come" it is only fair, and helpful to the learning process, to better understand them too. Humans are a very verbal species, and that is most often our primary method of communication, but although domestic dogs have become more verbal in some ways (although they have many vocalizations, wolves do not bark), dogs still remain more visual (body language) and intuitive (energy). Do not discount the importance of energy. Even a blind dog, though handicapped in one way, is perfectly capable of being a fully functioning pack member by reading energy. In simple terms - Have you ever felt instantly comfortable and at ease around a dog (or a person)? Or vice versa, instantly edgy or uncomfortable and couldn't quite explain why? THAT is energy. It takes practice to learn to listen to "reading energy." So, for now, we will focus on Body Language, which also takes practice to learn but has the benefit of being more visible and tangible. This is NOT an exhaustive list, merely a possible sampling of behaviors:

#### **Features of a Relaxed Dog:**

1. relaxed mouth, jowls and lips relaxed and not tight, may have almost a smile, tongue may be hanging out
2. eyes are "soft"
3. Tail low, may or may not be wagging gently
4. Flat hair coat (no hackles)
5. If standing or sitting may be resting on one hip or the other
6. a relaxed but happy dog may tend to display more excited behaviors, than a relaxed, sleepy dog...and an excited, happy dog will also display more excited behavior, but will be much easier to work with (and easier for the dog to learn) once some of the excited energy is drained to produce a more relaxed state

#### **Features of Frightened Dog:**

1. possibly a flattened body with ears back, hairs on neck and back (hackles) standing up
2. eyes more "hard," may see the whites of the eyes, will probably refuse to look at you (first clue to back off and give a little more space - to not stare at, or force eye contact)
3. Tail often tucked under the body
4. backing away from you, cowering in the corner, turning head away
5. may try to run away if possible...may crouch down, or completely flatten on the ground
6. may evacuate bladder, bowels, or anal glands
7. Might growl, if allowed to escalate may result in a bite...most of these dogs give ample warning they are uncomfortable...respect that! It is OUR job to teach them not to be afraid. This is only done slowly, with repeat positive encounters that do not push them too far too fast, but instead build up their confidence over time. This is never done through force.

### **Features of an Aggressive Dog:**

1. Growling or sharp, tight mouthed barking; snarling.
2. can have an upright, stiff, body posture
3. Tail may be erect, can sometimes wag back and forth in a stiff, quick, upright wag (unlike the long, low, sweeping motion of a relaxed, happy dog) ears often forward, but can also be back.
4. if the signs from a frightened dog are ignored, it can quickly escalate into more serious behaviors
5. a very pushy, dominant dog may take their desire to be in charge to the next level...by always paying close attention to the signs your dog is giving you, and reading your dog appropriately, you can accurately anticipate any escalation in behavior

There are many things to learn about working with dogs, especially rescued dogs from a myriad of situations. Each dog has their own unique personality, needs, and behaviors. The intention here is to give you a brief overview of a few aspects of learning to "read" a dog, which will be a very important step to learning to handle dogs.

If you talk to the animals,  
they will talk to you,  
and you will know each other.  
If you do not talk to them,  
you will not know them,  
And what you do not know,  
you will fear.  
What one fears,  
one destroys.

Chief Dan George

That is our goal...to teach people to learn from pit bulls, help rehabilitate them, find loving homes, and in turn...teach the world to stop fearing, and destroying, these wonderful dogs. They will teach us far more in return, if we only listen.