



FRIENDS OF HOMELESS ANIMALS

Guide for Dog Walkers



February 2026

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Welcome to Friends of Homeless Animals (FOHA)

Thank you for your interest in volunteering to walk dogs at FOHA! This document will give you an overview of the dog walking safety, policies, procedures, and best practices at FOHA. Volunteers are welcome to provide feedback to help make the experience more enjoyable for volunteers and dogs.

Note: The amount of information in this document may seem overwhelming, but please take the time to read it thoroughly for your safety, the safety of others around you and our dogs' safety.

Introduction to Dog Handling at FOHA

While it can be challenging to be a dog walker at FOHA, it can also be very rewarding. You may help a shy dog transform from fearful to confident and affectionate. You may help an energetic dog learn to walk better on a leash, helping its chances for adoption. Or you may simply provide comfort to an older dog that was returned to us through no fault of its own.

Volunteers come to FOHA with a love for animals. Many feel comfortable with their dog-handling skills after having pets of their own. It is important to remember animals in a shelter will likely not act like the pets in your home. The dogs in a kennel environment have additional stress and may react in unexpected ways, including nipping and even biting. Shelter animals come to FOHA with no familiar smells, bedding, people, or noises. It takes time for dogs to adjust to new faces, sharing communal space, and the smells and sounds of a shelter.

Please always pay close attention to the dog you're walking and use additional caution when handling any of the dogs, especially around toys, food, grooming, etc. If you encounter a situation that you aren't sure how to handle, ask another volunteer or staff member.

It's very important to know the signs of stress and fearful behavior to ensure volunteers remain safe, while keeping the animals as comfortable as possible. Please see the section on understanding dog body language and the recommended resources at the end of this guide.

Importance of Dog Walkers

Volunteers are key to the animals' overall health and well-being while they are at FOHA waiting for their forever families. Each dog walker provides enrichment, observation, reporting, and advocacy. Dog walkers can also help dogs overcome challenges that may be preventing them from being adopted.

- *ENRICH:* Allow dogs to experience new people, new smells, and new environments and activities, all while getting exercise, burning off energy, and getting some love. You may

also work with the dog to learn new skills that may make them more appealing to adopters and increase their chances of staying in a home once adopted.

- *OBSERVE*: While with the dogs, observe behavior, character traits, likes/dislikes, and other information that will help us provide the best environment for the dog, work on training as needed, and ultimately help us match the dog with a great family.
- *REPORT*: Share observations with staff and other volunteers. Use the behavior log (found in the office), emails, FOHA Mobile App, etc. to report on any training you provided, and what you have observed and experienced during your time with a dog.
- *ADVOCATE*: Our goal is to get the dogs adopted into great homes as quickly as possible. FOHA volunteers are key advocates for the dogs they interact with. You can help promote these animals on social media, NextDoor, to friends/neighbors/family, etc., to help get them adopted. We need everyone to help in the adoption process!
- *OVERCOME*: Use skills gained through FOHA's dog walker training program to help dogs work on behavior quirks and overcome challenges that may be holding them back from being adopted.

Volunteer Expectations and Requirements

As a dog handler, you should be aware that:

- Walking dogs at FOHA is a very physical activity done in all types of weather.
- Walking dogs in a shelter environment is often different from walking your family pet in your own neighborhood.
- Dogs in a shelter environment have additional stress and may react in unexpected ways, including nipping and even biting.

As a dog handler, you must:

- Be at least 18 years old. No one under 18 may hold a dog's leash or handle a dog alone. (No children under 13 may accompany you at the shelter.)
- Be 100% focused on safety—your own and that of the dog you're with, as well as the safety of other animals and the people around you.
- Have strong situational awareness: pay close attention to the dog you're walking and everything around you.
- Be aware of the consequences of safety violations. Please review the Disciplinary Action Policy at the end of this guide.
- Use caution when handling a dog, especially around toys, food, grooming, etc.
- Read all signage on a dog's kennel door and behavior notes on the FOHA app prior to walking.

- Follow all dog handling procedures and shelter rules conveyed through this document, posted signage, or verbally by another volunteer or staff member.
- Do not use your cellphone or headphones when walking a dog. Taking pictures and videos of dogs when in the play yard, however, is encouraged!
- DO NOT run on property with a dog.

Suggested Supplies/Equipment

- 6-foot slip lead (borrow from shelter or bring your own)
 - Example: [Fida Durable 6-foot slip lead](#)
- Treat pouch/bag (or fanny pack)
 - Example: [Silicone Dog Treat Pouch](#)
- Pea-size training treats (e.g., kibble, Charlie Bear or Buddy Biscuits training treats). (Note: save the “good stuff” like boiled chicken, sliced hotdog, and cheese for working on behavior modification so the dog has something of higher value to look forward to.)
- Poop bags (plenty in the office)

What to Wear (And Not Wear)

“If you’re not dirty when you leave FOHA, you’ve done something wrong.” – FOHA dog walker

Please don’t wear anything “nice” to the shelter to walk dogs, such as your favorite pair of black leggings or your best white tennis shoes. Dog walking is a very physical activity done in all types of weather. Note that the walking trails are often muddy.

Required: Close-toed shoes

Recommended:

- Long pants with pockets
- Sturdy, waterproof shoes or boots
- Volunteer T-shirt, sweatshirt, etc.
- Layers, especially in the cold months



Color Coding/Dog-Walking Levels

All volunteers start out walking the Level 1 “green” dogs. Dog walker orientation is the Level 1 training. It’s very important that volunteers only walk dogs for which they’ve had the appropriate level of training. The color of each dog’s kennel sign/profile sheet and the tag on the spring clip on its kennel door latch correspond to the level of training that must be

completed by any volunteers who want to walk that dog. Volunteers can sign up for additional optional training classes via their Get Connected volunteer profile at foha.galaxydigital.com. Training classes at each level will go over specific games, foundation behaviors, and modifications to help the dogs who have that level/color designation. The more everyone sticks to the same training techniques, the easier it will be for each pup to understand what we're asking, which will lead to less frustration for dogs and handlers...and a better experience for all! Be aware that green-level dogs are adopted quickly. You may want to take the yellow-level training as soon as you are comfortable to have a bigger selection of dogs to walk.

GREEN LEVEL
Small and/or easy on the leash, good manners, well adjusted.

YELLOW LEVEL
Energetic, puppy behavior, may pull slightly on leash, needs work on basic manners

ORANGE LEVEL
Very strong on the leash, becomes easily overstimulated and mouthy, very shy, dog-reactive, may be hard to get in/out of the kennel.

SENIOR VOLUNTEER ONLY
Dogs with a bite or safety risk, a known bite history, are reactive to people, are resource guarders. **MUST READ FILE, KNOW TRIGGERS, AND BE INTRODUCED.**

DESIGNATED VOLUNTEER ONLY
Dogs with multiple bites, unknown triggers, dangerous dogs, dogs that may redirect on handlers. **MUST READ FILE, KNOW TRIGGERS, BE INTRODUCED, AND SIGN A WAIVER.**



For more information about classes beyond basic orientation (Level 1), email Diara Washington, diarawashington@foha.org.

Advanced Classes

Two-Part Yellow-Level Training

- [Part 1: Virtual Self-Paced Course](#): You MUST complete this to be able to sign up for the Yellow-Level hands-on class.
- [Part 2: Hands-on Session](#): In person at FOHA.

Orange-Level Specialty Classes

You must complete the two-part yellow-level training before you can sign up for these classes.

- Two-Part Reactivity Training:
 - [Reactivity, Part 1 \(Virtual Self-Paced Course\)](#)
 - [Reactivity, Part 2 \(Hands-on Session\)](#)
- [Shy Dogs \(Hands-on Session\)](#)
- [Strong On Leash \(Hands-on Session\)](#)
- [Jumpy and Mouthy \(Hands-on Session\)](#)

Key Areas for Dog Walkers at FOHA

- 1) Doors
- 2) Signs
- 3) Clips (Clothespins)
- 4) Slip Leads
- 5) Harnesses
- 6) Distance
- 7) FOHA Mobile App

Doors

- The kennel buildings have double doors at each entrance. Only one door should be open at a time to prevent an escape route for a dog.
- All doors to dog containment areas have glass windows. Make yourself visible when you approach a door. Ensure other volunteers can see you as you get close to a door.
- Look through the windows carefully before going through each door. If you have a dog with you, do not enter the kennel area if someone else is getting a dog out or putting one away. If you do not have a dog, ensure any dog being taken out of or put back into a run is secure (on a slip lead or closed in its run) before you open the door. If you see a loose dog running around when you look through the glass, do not enter unless you can identify the dog as one you have walked before and feel comfortable around. If there is no person visible with the loose dog, notify a staff member or another volunteer.
- Ensure the door is closed securely behind you after entering.
- In the dog run areas, only one gate is to be open at a time. Dogs are most likely to slip away when they are coming out of their runs or being put away. To avoid the possibility of two dogs getting loose at the same time, only one volunteer at a time should have a kennel door/gate open.
- You may have to back away from a door to give another volunteer plenty of room to pass by with a dog.
- After putting a dog back in its run, ensure the kennel door is securely closed, and make sure to reattach the spring clip.

Signs

- Read all the signage posted on each dog's kennel door.
- Be sure to note the dog's name; the kennels can all look the same, and you want to be sure to put the dog into the correct kennel.
- Most signs are self-explanatory but if you're unsure what a sign means, ask another volunteer or a staff member. Pay particular attention to behavior-related signage and medical notes/restrictions such as "no play yards" or "short walks only."

Clips (Clothespins)

- Our goal is for each dog to get walked at least four times per week. On Saturdays and Sundays, every dog will get walked at least once, although weather conditions and availability of volunteers occasionally make this challenging.
- We use clothespins to keep track of when dogs have been walked. There are containers with clothespins in each of the kennel buildings. Either before you walk a dog or when you bring it back, put a clothespin on the appropriate day on the "days of the week" sign on the dog's kennel door. The color of the clothespin doesn't matter.
- When deciding which dog to walk, please give preference to one that hasn't yet been walked on the current or previous day.
- Please use clips even if you use the FOHA app to check a dog out and in for their walk.



Slip Leads

- All dogs get walked using a standard 6-foot slip lead. Although slip leads are provided at the shelter, occasionally there aren't enough clean ones for all volunteers. If you'd like to purchase your own, you can find them at www.amazon.com or www.dog.com. No retractable leashes, choke collars, or prong collars are permitted.
- Having a secure grip on the slip lead is critical! Place your hand through the loop so that the loop is around your wrist. DO NOT hold the loop using only your fingers. Your grip will be much more secure when your hand is through the loop and grasping the handle.



- After slipping the lead over the dog's head, slide the leather locking tab down to hold the loop in place. Tighten the loop with the locking tab until there is about two fingers' worth of space between the dog's neck and the lead. This is loose enough for the dog to easily breathe and secure enough that it will not inadvertently slip off. If you don't do this, the loop can loosen, and your dog can back out of its leash and escape.
- Please routinely check the tab to ensure that it is not coming loose during your walk and readjust as needed.
- If you need more control, pull the leash closer to your body and hold it with two hands. You will need to do this when moving through a congested area.
- Do not jerk and yank the leash, snapping the dog's head and neck. For energetic dogs that are pulling steadily or lunging, do your best to maintain a steady pressure on the leash. Be aware that being too rough with pressure can cause dogs to have a negative reaction to the leash. Be sure to release pressure when the dog calms down and becomes more manageable! Ask FOHA staff or another volunteer for help, if needed.

- The leashes are very durable, but if yours is frayed or damaged, replace it.

Harnesses

- FOHA uses the 2Hounds Freedom No-Pull harnesses. If there is a harness on a dog's kennel door (usually found in a black basket), you must walk the dog with that harness **AND** the slip lead, unless otherwise noted.
- Each dog's harness has been adjusted for them and has a tag with their name on it. Make sure it stays at their kennel after you walk them. Do not move a dog's harness or use it for another dog.
- If a dog has a harness, you will be holding two leashes when walking them--the slip lead **plus** the additional leash attached to the harness. If you need help putting a harness on a dog, please ask someone.
- When walking the dog, put the tension on the leash attached to the harness and leave the slip lead slack. Ensure you have a secure grip on both.
- Note that in the Village and in Josh's Footprint, harnesses may be hanging on the dog's gate or outside of the dog's house.
- On the 2Hounds harnesses, the leash can be clipped to the front ring (recommended for strong dogs/pullers) or the top/back ring.
- The easiest, most out-of-the-way place to put a harness on a dog is:
 - Lines 1/2: Entryway/Kitchen area
 - Lines 5/6: The enclosed, gated area right outside the back door, or in the bathroom or grooming room off the kitchen
 - Lines 7/8: The bathroom or grooming room off the kitchen
- Please don't put a dog's harness on in the aisle between kennels, and don't put it on in front of a door--people may not be able to see you if you're bent over or kneeling.
- If you're walking a dog that has only a slip lead and they end up being a strong puller, you may want to get them a harness from the adoption office. Someone in the office can help you fit the harness for the dog. Leave the new harness at the dog's run at the end of the walk.
- Note that some dogs are only walked with a slip lead due to touch sensitivity. This will be noted on signage on their run.



Distance

- For safety, always keep a 15-foot distance between your dog and other dogs. This ensures that dog-reactive dogs do not encounter other dogs, and all dogs can feel comfortable when out walking. You should also keep the dog you're walking well away from dogs behind exercise yard/play yard fences.
- The rough estimate for judging 15 feet is that your dog is at the end of your extended arm and extended leash, and there is still a significant distance between you and someone else under a similar condition, so that the dogs may not reach each other.
- Please also keep your dog at least 15 feet away from other people. Not all visitors, volunteers, and potential adopters are "dog people."
- It will be necessary to shorten your leash to maintain the 15-foot distance as you move through congested areas, such as the parking lot.
- While out on the trails, you can either move off the trail into the brush to give someone a clear avenue to pass (be mindful of briars, poison ivy, etc. when you leave the trail), or you can double back and take a different route to maintain the proper distance. If the shelter is busy and the area around the Welcome Center or office is crowded, feel free to take the long way around the parking area and up the hill to reach the 5-6/7-8 building.
- If your dog is known to be reactive to other dogs or people, it's a good idea to stay farther than 15 feet away. Feel free to warn other volunteers about the dog you have so they give you an extra buffer of space.

- Do not walk dogs together. Occasionally, you may observe senior volunteers walking certain pairs of dogs together or taking them together into a play yard. These dog pairs are carefully orchestrated among dogs who have already met each other during weekday dog play groups, and they are carefully supervised.
- An additional exception is dog introductions with potential adopters' dogs. Staff or senior volunteers conduct these introductions in a play yard.

FOHA Mobile App

- We have a [Mobile App](#) for our dog walking and cat snuggling volunteers.
- As a dog walker you can use the app to:
 - check on what dogs have/haven't been walked.
 - check a dog out and in for their walks.
 - read important information about this dog including behavior notes.
 - upload photos and videos of a dog
 - provide your own behavior notes and rating for other volunteers and staff.
 - submit non-emergency requests and questions to the Behavior Team, Medical Team, Shelter Operations Team, and Facilities Team.

General Walking Guidelines

When You Arrive

- Please sign in (and out) using the 'Causer' mobile app or via 'Get Connected' on the tablet in the adoption office, found near the volunteer entrance. You may bring a visitor with you to walk dogs, but they may not handle the leash if they have not completed the dog-walking orientation. Please ensure any visitors sign in and complete a digital visitor waiver form. Please ask a staff member or volunteer in the office if you need help accessing it on the tablet or office computer. .
- Children who are at least 13 years old may accompany dog walkers but are not allowed to have control of the leash at any time, even if they have been through orientation. This is for insurance liability reasons.
- There are poop bags in one of the drawers in the sign-in area if you need them. Please feel free to grab some when you arrive to prepare for your walks.
- Note any new signage about temporary or permanent changes to procedures or those that ask for volunteer assistance. Examples: quarantine procedures, weigh-in weekend procedures, request for help with dog photo sessions.

Kennel Buildings, Village, Josh's Footprint

- **Lines 1/2:** First kennel building, closest to the adoption office. Mix of green-, yellow-, and orange-level dogs, as well as senior-volunteer-only and designated-volunteer-only dogs. Enter/exit through the front or back door. Try to use the door closest to the dog's kennel.
- **Lines 3/4:** Quarantine building. Staff Only. Dogs new to FOHA stay here for their first 10 days to ensure that they don't have any active illnesses.
- **Lines 5-8:** Largest kennel building. Mix of green-, yellow-, and orange-level dogs, as well as senior-volunteer-only and designated-volunteer-only dogs. If the dog you're going to walk is housed in lines 5/6, enter or exit through the side door or main/kitchen door, depending on which is closest to the dog's kennel. If the dog you're going to walk is housed in lines 7/8, you must enter and exit through the main/kitchen door.
- **Josh's Footprint:** Located next to lines 7/8. Houses dogs who need more space, fewer neighbors, less foot traffic, and/or a quieter environment. It's very important to keep a dog close to you when getting them in or out, as this is a small area where dogs can easily reach each other.
- **Senior Village:** Located behind the adoption office. Houses long-term resident dogs. **These dogs may only be walked by senior volunteers**, but any volunteer may enter and walk down the central aisle. You may toss treats to the dogs over their fence, but don't put your fingers through the chain link.

Getting a Dog out of the Kennel/Run

- When walking past the kennels looking for a dog to walk, remember to avoid prolonged direct eye contact with the dogs.
- Before opening a kennel door, let the dog get used to your presence, smell, and voice, and give the dog a treat by sliding it under their door.
- Read all signage on the kennel door.
- Adjust the slip lead so it's ready to go over the dog's head and make sure the handle is around your wrist. Have a treat in your hand.
- Remove the spring clip from the door latch. Open the latch and **slowly** open the kennel door, keeping your body in front of the door so that the dog can't push it open. Try to go slow and stay calm. Dogs can sense and feed off our emotions; if you rush to get a dog out of the kennel, it will likely make the dog more anxious/energetic.
- Open the door wide enough to put your hand in or have the dog stick its head out.
- It can help to hold a treat through the loop to encourage the dog to put its head through.
- Let the loop drop around the neck of the dog; the loop will tighten. Then quickly remove the dog from the kennel, keeping a short leash. Be mindful of the dogs in nearby

kennels. Walk the dog down the middle of the aisle toward the exit, keeping the dog moving to get them out of line as quickly as possible.

- DO NOT let the dog approach the kennel of another dog.
- If the dog has a harness, be sure to put it on before taking them outside. See above section about harnesses for more details.
- If the dog is cowering in the back of its kennel, doesn't come forward to the door, or otherwise doesn't seem to want to walk, don't force the slip lead onto them. Someone else can try to walk them later.
- Make sure to close the kennel door even if the kennel is empty.

While on a Walk

- Please don't use your cellphone or headphones.
- Keep your dog at least 15 feet away from other dogs and people, including dogs behind play yard or exercise yard fences.
- Do not walk your dog up to the play yard fencing when other dogs are in there.
- Watch out for Riley, the black-and-white community cat. He isn't afraid of dogs and will often sit where they are likely to pass by. He often hangs out in and around the Welcome Center, so use extra caution when walking a dog in that area.
- If you're uncomfortable with your dog for any reason, return it to its kennel and select a different dog (and ask for help doing so, if needed)

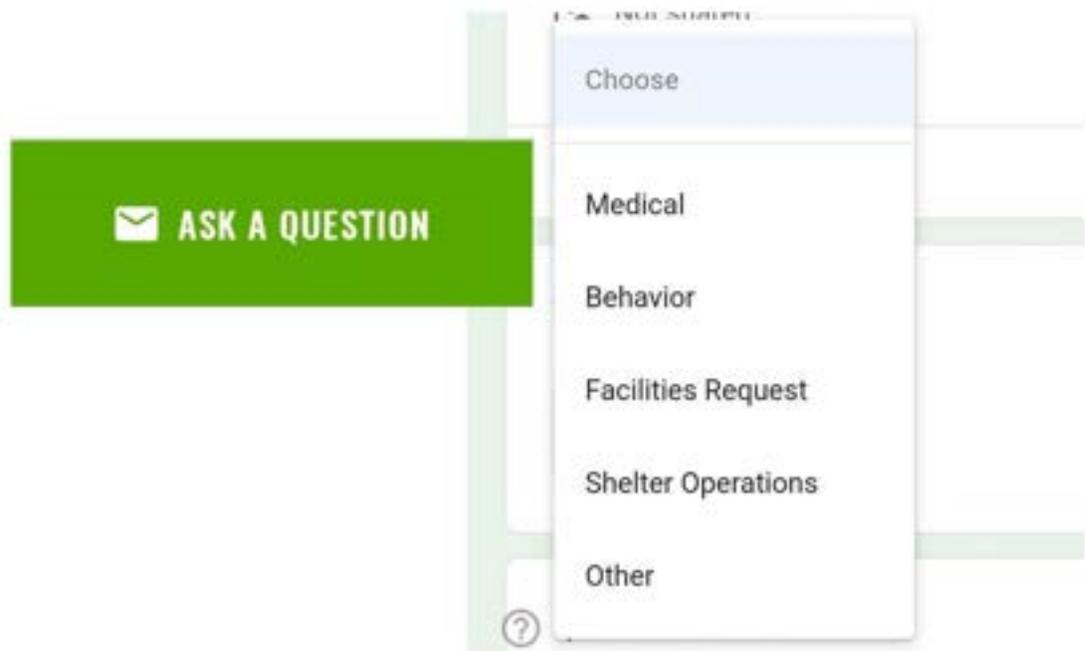
Trails

- Remain on the trails while you are walking to avoid potential hazards in the woods, such as poison ivy. This will also help keep you from getting lost; if you follow the mulched trails, you'll eventually emerge either at the driveway or one of the open areas of the property within view of the 5-6/7-8 building or the Welcome Center.
- Please do not run with the dogs. The trails are rough and uneven with roots, rocks, and mud; running may cause you to fall and/or lose control of your dog.
- You may want to apply insect repellent prior to walking in the woods and check for ticks after you are done walking for the day.

Shelter Personnel

- FOHA has about 10-15 paid staff members who work very hard cleaning, feeding, medicating, and maintaining the animals and grounds at the shelter. Feel free to introduce yourself when you see them. You may ask them if you need help with something, but please be aware that they tend to be busy and concentrating on a task.
- Staff members usually wear T-shirts or sweatshirts with the word "STAFF" on them in large white letters.

- Please defer to staff members if they ask you to avoid a certain area while they clean it, etc. or make other requests having to do with the completion of their duties.
- Please follow all of the rules and safety instructions given by staff.
- When the shelter is open to the public (i.e., Friday-Sunday from 12:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.), at least one person will be staffing the adoption office as the dog adoption lead. These staff and volunteers are trained to work in the office helping prospective adopters meet dogs and find the one(s) they would like to adopt.
 - Please defer to adoption leads if they ask you to vacate the play yard or hand your dog over to them. In both cases, this will be because a potential adopter wants to use the play yard to interact with a potential new pet or is interested in meeting the dog you're walking.
 - Especially when the office is busy, adoption leads may ask you to “pull” a certain dog, which means to go to its run and bring it out for a prospective adopter to meet. You are welcome to do this if a lead volunteer asks.
 - Please do not give a dog to a potential adopter or pull one from its run to give to a potential adopter unless instructed to do so by a dog adoption lead. The office needs to keep track of what dogs potential adopters are walking—if a potential adopter asks you to get a dog for them, please politely direct them to the office and explain that the office will go over the dog's file with them and then ask someone to get the dog for them.
- If you have non-urgent questions or comments for staff, please use the 'Ask a Question' button on the FOHA app home screen.



Ensuring a Safe and Positive Experience for Dogs and People

Greeting and Interacting with a New Dog

- Approach from an angle. Turn sideways. Move slowly, avoiding sudden movements.
- Talk to the dog in a calm, gentle voice.
- Bend at the knees to get at the dog's level. Do not sit on the ground.
- Never lean over the dog. Looming may be intimidating to a fearful dog.
- Don't hug a dog you don't know or get in its face.
- Don't reach over a dog's head to pet it; initial contact should come from the side, and pet with a slow, steady motion.
- Stay relaxed, as dogs can read your body language.
- Allow the dog to make the approach.
- Do not stare the dog in the face; avoid prolonged direct eye contact.
- Do not take a dog's food or other high-value items (like toys or treats).

Introduction to Dog Body Language

Dogs communicate through their body language and by barking and growling. It's important to understand what a dog is telling us to make sure that our interactions with them are not only safe, but enjoyable for the dogs. If a dog is telling us they're anxious, stressed, or fearful, we need to change our behavior and/or the environment the dog is in. If we ignore what a dog is telling us or don't understand their message, they may feel they have no choice but to bite.

Know the Signs of a Relaxed, Comfortable Dog:

- Relaxed muscles in the face
- Relaxed open mouth, or closed without tension
- Soft, partially closed eyes
- Body oriented toward you
- Ears in neutral position
- Neutral tail either still or wagging slowly across a wide range



Picture credit: St. Huberts Animal Welfare Center

Know the Signs of a Fearful, Anxious, or Stressed Dog:

- Hard, unblinking stare (also known as “whale eye” or “side eye”)
- Tucked tail
- Body oriented away from you
- Crouched body position
- Lip lick/tongue flick
- Yawning or panting
- Holding a paw/leg up
- Ears pinned back



Picture credit: St. Huberts Animal Welfare Center

What to Do in Urgent Situations

Escaped/Loose Dog

- If your dog gets loose while you are outside, don't panic and don't chase the dog. It seems counterintuitive to not do so, but dogs are often either playfully or fearfully triggered into running away when they feel chased. There are a few general guidelines to follow when a dog has gotten loose that may be adjusted according to the dog's temperament, if known.
- If the dog sprints off into the woods, note the direction of the dog's escape while shouting, "Loose dog, loose dog!" "XYZ has escaped!" Use the dog's name when calling for assistance so people know who is on the loose. After alerting others to the situation, calmly follow along after the dog and try to keep it in sight.
- If the dog is close by and running around playfully, try to engage it in play and entice it into an open play yard with treats.
- If the dog is fearful, respect its fear when approaching. Running and shouting will likely spook it and make it very difficult to capture. Slow down and approach it quietly and indirectly. Again, try using treats to entice it.

- Direct someone to report the escape to the office. If others have taken over the recovery, report the incident yourself: go to the office and tell the lead volunteer(s) who escaped and in roughly what direction they were headed.
- Notify other volunteers in the area that a dog is loose.
- Notify the office when the dog has been recovered.
- The adoption office phone number is 703-327-4530.

Dog Fight/Attack on Another Dog (or Cat)

- The 15-foot distance rule is in place to significantly reduce the risk of dog-to-dog incidents while walking dogs. If a dog shows signs of escalating behavior or an incident occurs, create distance as quickly, calmly, and safely as possible while maintaining control of the leash. Avoid yelling, physical intervention, or escalating responses. Focus on safely disengaging and creating space.
- If the incident seems to be escalating or difficult to control, yell "dog fight!" to get help from nearby staff and volunteers.
- If your dog appears to need medical attention, alert a staff member or take the dog to the office so someone can contact shelter management and/or veterinary personnel.
- If the attack involved one of the outdoor community cats, report it immediately to the adoption office so staff/volunteers may determine if the cat needs medical attention. Describe the cat's appearance as best you can to help identify which cat it was. (Note: Riley is the friendly black-and-white cat that you'll most often see wandering around.)
- Fill out an incident report, available in the office.

Bites

- Dog bites may happen for a variety of reasons, and there will be some discretion as to how a bite situation is handled.
- If the dog you're walking bites you:
 - If you can safely put it away, please do so. If not, call for help from nearby volunteers or staff.
 - If you and the dog are in the play yard and you can safely leave the play yard, do so and find a staff member or experienced volunteer to help you as quickly as possible.
- If the dog you're walking bites another person:
 - If you feel you can put the dog back safely, please do so. Otherwise, call for help or ask the person who was bitten (if urgent medical attention is not needed) to find a staff member or experienced volunteer to help you. You may consider the dog adoption office the default place to find help if you cannot locate an experienced volunteer or staff member right away.
- If you or someone else needs medical attention, please see the relevant section below.
- After the issue is resolved, please fill out an incident report in the adoption office.

Medical Attention for People and Dogs

- Please note non-urgent dog-related medical issues in the medical log, which is in the Adoption Office on a clipboard above the sign-in tablet, to the right of where the slip leads hang.
- If a dog appears to need immediate medical attention, bring it to the office, if possible, to alert a staff member or lead volunteer. If you can't move the dog and need help, please call 703-327-4530. It will ring a dedicated phone in the Adoption Office. If a dog is straining to poop or urinate, that should be considered an urgent situation.
- If you are injured or become incapacitated during a walk, call for help if there is anyone nearby. If you need someone to come get your dog and/or help you, call 703-327-4530. It will ring a dedicated phone in the Adoption Office.
- If you need medical care, the facilities closest to FOHA are as follows:
 - Inova Urgent Care Center - Dulles South at 24801 Pinebrook Rd #110, Chantilly, VA 20152 (12 minutes from FOHA)
 - HOSPITAL/EMERGENCY ROOM: Stone Springs Hospital Center at 24440 Stone Springs Blvd, Dulles, VA 20166 (10 minutes from FOHA).

Disciplinary Action Policy

Safety violations are addressed promptly and consistently to protect volunteers, staff, visitors, and the animals in our care. Disciplinary actions are determined by FOHA staff based on the severity of the incident, prior history, and overall risk. FOHA reserves the right to move directly to any level of discipline if warranted by the circumstances.

Non-Bite Safety Incidents

Non-bite incidents include, but are not limited to, unsafe handling, failure to follow protocols, ignoring staff direction, or behavior that creates risk to people or animals.

1. **Incident 1 - Volunteer Warning**
A verbal or written warning outlining the safety concern and expectations for immediate correction.
2. **Incident 2 - Warning with Mandatory Retraining**
The volunteer is required to attend specified training as determined by staff. The volunteer may not walk dogs or participate in related activities until retraining is successfully completed.
3. **Incident 3 - Suspension (30–90 Days)**
Temporary removal from all volunteer activities for a period determined by staff.
4. **Incident 4 - Expulsion from the FOHA Volunteer Program**
Permanent removal from the volunteer program due to continued or serious safety violations.

Bite Incidents

Bite incidents are taken extremely seriously due to the immediate risk to people, animals, and FOHA's ability to maintain insurance coverage.

1. **Incident 1 - Mandatory Retraining and Immediate Restriction**

The volunteer is required to attend specified training as determined by staff. The volunteer may not walk dogs or participate in related activities until retraining is successfully completed.

2. **Incident 2 - Suspension (30–90 Days)**

Temporary removal from all volunteer activities for a period determined by staff.

3. **Incident 3 - Expulsion from the FOHA Volunteer Program**

Permanent removal from the volunteer program.

FOHA reserves the right to bypass any step in the disciplinary process and impose immediate suspension or expulsion based on the severity of the incident, risk to people or animals, or impact on FOHA's operations and insurance requirements.

Recommended Resources

- **Fear Free Shelters:** Excellent free training program focused on dealing with fear, anxiety, stress (FAS) and frustration in shelter dogs (and cats). Earn a certificate on completion. <https://fearfreeshelters.com/>
- **Consent petting:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=-hsOIJwMwps>
- **Handling a nervous dog:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=et6dSE7pGfg>
- **Fear Free grooming:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qr2oNQSV30M>
- **Speaking Dog! Canine Communication:** 3-part webinar series from the ASPCA: <https://www.aspcapro.org/training/webinar/speaking-dog-canine-communication-1-3>
- **The Culture Clash:** Named the number one training book by the Association of Pet Dog Trainers. https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/159896.The_Culture_Clash
- **Maddie's University:** Offers a wide range of free self-paced courses on various aspects of animal behavior. <https://university.maddiesfund.org/products/fundamentals-of-canine-communication-and-safe-dog-handling>

Additional Dog Squad Volunteer Opportunities

Once you've completed the basic dog walking orientation, you will be able to help with many other volunteer opportunities at FOHA! Below are the dog-related activities you may want to get involved with. Thank you for volunteering!

Activity	Description	Contact
Adoption Events	Give your favorite dog some time away from the shelter and show them off to potential adopters.	dogadoptionevents@foha.org
New Dog Intake	Help a dog complete their journey to FOHA or help them get settled once they arrive.	dogintake@foha.org
Dog Adoption Office Lead	Be a matchmaker for FOHA's dogs and potential adopters!	lauraeddy@foha.org
Home Visit Team	Meet with potential adopters to answer questions and set them up for success during this last step before adoption approval.	fohahv@foha.org
Tails to Trails	Take a dog to a local park on a Sunday morning for a hike and to enjoy a change of scenery. Must have completed Level 2 + 3 training classes to participate.	fohatara@gmail.com
Doggie Social	Join in the weekly supervised playgroups or grab a volunteer and run a social pair! Help dogs make new friends and show us their personalities. Regular playgroup held on Wednesdays at 11:00. Must be eligible to walk orange-level dogs.	diarawashington@foha.org
Short- or Long-Term Fostering	Give a dog a break from the shelter and help us learn more about them. Take them for a weekend or longer!	fosteradog@foha.org
Assist a Caregiver	Learn how to help with laundry, cleaning, and other activities to help our hard-working Caregivers take care of the necessary tasks at FOHA.	alisonmaurhoff@foha.org

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: When may I come out to walk?

A: The shelter is open for trained dog walkers everyday between 12:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. During Daylight Savings this is extended to 6:00 p.m. Volunteers are especially needed Monday-Friday.

Q: What about holidays?

A: Most holidays, the shelter is open during select hours to trained volunteers. Information about specific hours will usually be posted in/on the public FOHA Facebook group and page, the FOHA volunteer forum group, the FOHA website, and/or the weekly FOHA volunteer newsletter.

Q: Where should I park?

A: Volunteers are asked to park to the left of the driveway (the driveway extends up past the Welcome Center). You can park in the gravel, the grass, or wherever you can find a spot. The parking lot in front of the adoption office is reserved for visitors and potential adopters.

Q: What should I wear when walking?

A: Wear clothing that is seasonally appropriate and expect to get dirty! Multiple light layers are recommended in the wintertime instead of a single, heavy layer. Walking is vigorous, and you will easily sweat. Dress as though you were going for a hike in the woods. Closed-toe shoes are required, even in the summer. We recommend that you wear something comfortable that also has a good tread, as the trails are frequently muddy and slippery. Consider dedicating a pair of shoes to FOHA dog-walking and bringing a second pair to change into for the ride home.

Q: May I use my cell phone while walking dogs?

A: The short answer is no. Please don't use your phone when you have a dog on-leash unless it's an emergency. It's a good idea to have both hands available and your full attention on the dog and your surroundings. In addition, please do not use earbuds to listen to music while walking a dog. It is important to be able to hear and communicate with other volunteers regarding things like passing each other on the trails or if an urgent situation arises. If, however, you take a dog into a play yard and would like to take pictures or video of the dog when you do not need to have control of its leash, please feel free!

Q: May I bring a friend/family member/kids with me?

A: Yes, you may bring a friend or family member with you. They may not handle the leash, though, unless they have gone through orientation. Please make sure they sign the visitor waiver in the adoption office. Parents or guardians may bring children who are at least 13 years old with them to walk **only** green- and yellow-level dogs. Please note that no one under 18 may

have control of a dog's leash at any time. This is a requirement of FOHA's insurance coverage and deviating from this policy could result in serious liability for the shelter.

Q: What type of treats should I bring with me and when should I give them to a dog?

A: If you'd like to bring treats with you to the shelter, please try to bring healthy, minimally processed treats that are made in the U.S. The best treat is plain cooked or boiled chicken. The dogs' diets are regulated, and indulgent treats can make them sick. If you do give treats besides plain cooked chicken or turkey, please limit them in size and amount, as the dogs' digestive systems can be unhappy after excessive treat intake over the weekend.

Treats should be used along with a marker word to reward behavior the dog is exhibiting that we want to continue. For example, if you say the dog's name and it looks at you in response, say "yes" (the marker word) and give them a treat. This will encourage them to continue to look at you when you say their name. Conversely, if a dog is jumping up on you or another person or is begging for a treat with their front paws up on you, do not give them a treat at that moment; doing so would likely increase the undesirable behavior.

Q: How long should I walk/spend time with a dog?

A: Please aim for at least 30 minutes, although that depends on you, the dog, and the weather. An energetic dog would love as long of a walk as you can give it. If the weather is poor (excessive heat, cold, rain, etc.), you may need to shorten the walk. An older dog may get a shorter walk but longer snuggle time. Take cues from your dog as to how it is doing on your walk. Do not hesitate to cut a walk short if the dog is struggling in the heat, limping, or moving stiffly. On the other hand, remember that for some of the dogs, walks with volunteers are the only significant time they have out of their runs and with human company for the week. They appreciate the time we spend with them!

Q: What things can I do with the dog?

A: You can walk, play, snuggle, or work on basic skills and enrichment. You may put down a blanket (available in the brown shed) or a yoga mat (available in the office) in a grassy area and sit with your dog in the shade or sun. Get the dog a frozen treat, or throw a handful of kibble down on a snuffle mat and say "find it!" Practice playing catch, getting the dog to respond to its name, or other skills you've learned in orientation and the advanced training classes. You can also sit with your dog in the Welcome Center (if Riley the cat isn't in there, or any other dogs).

Q: May I groom the dog?

A: Yes! If you would like to brush your dog and the dog is comfortable with it, brushes and combs are available in the office. Especially if the dog doesn't know you, a good approach is to show the brush to the dog, let them sniff it, and then slowly move it toward their body. Let the dog choose when they're done being groomed. You may want to watch [Fear Free Grooming](#) for tips. Please clean up the fur after you've finished and return grooming supplies to the office.

Q: What if I notice something wrong with the dog?

A: If the condition is not severe, note it in the medical log (located on a clipboard next to the sign-in sheet in the adoption office). If the dog is in distress, ensure staff or someone in the office is made aware.

Q: What if the dog has already been walked and I want to take it out again?

A: If we have a lot of other dogs that still need to be walked, please walk some of them before coming back to this dog. If all the dogs have been walked (or all the dogs you are eligible/trained to walk have been walked) on a Saturday or Sunday, you are welcome to take a dog out for a second walk if the weather conditions do not seem overly taxing for a dog to be out again (e.g., extreme heat or cold; please be mindful of the dog's condition related to these conditions when you go out for a second walk). Please use the clip/clothespin system to indicate a second walk.

Q: Do I need to pick up after the dog?

A: Yes. Nobody likes getting dog poop on their shoe, and it helps with the condition of the shelter. Plus, dog poop can spread disease.

Q: What if I need help putting a harness on a dog?

A: Ask another volunteer or staff member for help. If you see someone struggling with a harness, offer to help them, because someday that person may be you! Remember: if the dog has a harness, you must use it. Don't walk the dog on only the slip lead because you can't get the harness attached. If no one is around to help you and you can't get the harness on a dog, please choose another dog to walk.

Q: How do I become a senior volunteer on the Dog Squad and start walking Senior Volunteer-Only Dogs?

A: Dogs are labeled "Senior Volunteer Only" for a variety of reasons including known bite or safety risk, bite history, reactivity to people, resource guarding, etc. The time at which you may be eligible to walk some of these dogs will depend on the dog and its reason for having this designation.

In general, to become a "Senior Volunteer," you should:

- 1) Walk dogs regularly at the shelter for several months following your initial orientation and feel comfortable and familiar with the procedures, rules, and layout of the shelter and the trails.
- 2) Complete all yellow- and orange-level training classes, plus any classes offered that relate to the behavior(s) of the dog(s) you want to start walking. Confirm your Senior Volunteer status with Diara Washington, diarawashington@foha.org.

- 3) Read the dog's file in the adoption office, particularly notes about why the dog has been labeled as a senior volunteer-only dog.
- 4) Approach a volunteer that you know walks that dog or ask another volunteer or a staff member in the adoption office if they know who walks that dog.

Individual introductions to senior volunteer-only dogs are critical, as dogs with this designation have it because there is something(s) a volunteer should know about that dog before attempting to walk it. A senior volunteer-only dog's regular walkers may introduce you and instruct you in the dogs' quirks and offer tips for their safe handling.

Please note that some dogs have demonstrated serious or unpredictable behavior challenges and may simply not be a fit for some volunteers. This is not an indication of any volunteer's ability to handle dogs; it is solely up to the dog in question, whose motivations/triggers may remain mysterious to us. The volunteer conducting the introduction has the discretion to choose to end the introduction at any time, and/or to advise that the dog does not seem amenable to interacting with you. Senior volunteers may also decline to conduct an introduction for any reason; please know that asking to meet a senior volunteer-only dog does not necessarily mean that the request will be granted. Also note that volunteers are not to be accompanied by friends or children when walking senior volunteer-only dogs.

How do I become a dog's designated volunteer?

Once you become a senior volunteer, you may be interested in becoming a particular dog's designated volunteer. Characteristics of "designated volunteer-only" dogs include multiple bites on their record, unknown triggers, known to redirect on their handlers, and official state or county designation as a "dangerous dog." Like the procedure with senior volunteer-only dogs, you should first read that dog's file to understand their history prior to and at FOHA. Next, one of that dog's existing designated volunteers will "introduce" you to the dog, reviewing any important information you should know about the dog before attempting to walk it, including tips for safe handling. Before walking the dog for the first time, sign the waiver form included in the dog's file in the office.

What else can I do to help at the shelter when I'm done walking dogs?

There's always something that needs to be done at FOHA, such as running laundry, washing dishes, sorting donation items, preparing enrichment for the dogs, miscellaneous maintenance, etc. Check in the office to find out what the pressing needs are and to get instructions.