



North Valley Animal Disaster Group Standard Operating Guidelines

Title: AGGRESSIVE ANIMALS

Objective: To assure the safety of personnel, and reduce the stress of animals as much as possible

Description:

Aggressive animals may be encountered during all operations. Volunteers must recognize aggression issues to remain safe and evaluate the level of resources needed. Do not approach or handle any animals that you are not comfortable with. Allow a trained professional with the correct equipment to deal with them. Most NVADG volunteers are NOT trained to this level, so on a regular basis, request an Animal Control Officer.

Dogs:

In dogs, there are several recognized types of aggression. The following are the categories of aggression that are likely to be encountered in our situations. Understanding the “motivation” of the aggression may help us make choices to help diffuse the aggression.

- Territorial Aggression: attacks when there is an intruder (friendly or not!)
- Protective Aggression: shows aggressive behavior when they think that one of their family members or friends is in peril
- Possessive Aggression: guards their possessions from others
- Fear Aggression: becomes aggressive if cornered or trapped.
 - Fear Aggression is one of the most encountered types of aggression
- Defensive Aggression: decides that the best defense is a good offense
- Pain-Elicited Aggression: otherwise gentle, behaves aggressively when in pain

Signs and progression of aggressive reactions in dogs, warning signs to be aware of:

- Becoming very still and rigid
- Guttural bark that sounds threatening
- Lunging forward or charging at the person with no contact
- Mouthing, as though trying to control the person, without applying significant pressure

- “Muzzle punch” (the dog literally punches the person with its nose)
- Growl, Snarl (a combination of growling and showing teeth)
- Snap, Quick nip that leaves no mark
- Quick bite that tears the skin
- Showing teeth
- Bite with enough pressure to cause a bruise
- Bite that causes puncture wounds
- Repeated bites in rapid succession
- Bite and shake

Aggressive cats:

Cats communicate their feelings through facial expressions, ears, eyes, whiskers, tail and body position. Cat body language is more subtle than a dog's and can be harder to interpret. Threats and aggression can be either offensive or defensive. An offensively aggressive cat tries to make himself look bigger and more intimidating, whereas a defensively aggressive cat adopts a self-protective posture and tries to make himself look smaller.

Offensive postures include:

- A stiff, straight-legged upright stance or stiffened rear legs, with the rear end raised
- Tail is stiff and lowered or held straight down to the ground
- Direct stare
- Upright ears, with the backs rotated slightly forward
- Piloerection (hackles up), including fur on the tail
- Constricted pupils
- Directly facing opponent, possibly moving toward him
- Might be growling, howling or yowling

Defensive postures include:

- Crouching
- Head tucked in
- Tail curved around the body and tucked in
- Eyes wide open with pupils partially or fully dilated
- Ears flattened sideways or backward on the head
- Piloerection (hackles up)
- In an anxious cat, whiskers might be retracted.
- In a fearful cat, whiskers might pan out and forward to assess distance between himself and the danger
- Turning sideways to the opponent, not straight on

- Open-mouthed hissing or spitting
- Might deliver quick strikes with front paws, claws out

Overt aggression, whether defensive or offensive, includes:

- Swatting, striking with paws
- Biting
- Fighting
- Growling, shrieking
- Scratching
- Preparing for an all-out attack by rolling onto side or back and exposing all weapons: teeth and claws
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The general rule is do not try to touch cats showing these positions!

Aggressive Horses:

Horses are not an overly aggressive species, but they can behave aggressively when:

- Threatened or frightened
- Pin pain or frustrated
- As a result of artificially created social groupings (e.g. in a boarding facility)
- As a result of inadequate early socialization
- As a result of certain medical conditions or diseases
- To control access to resources such as food, breeding partners, water, space etc.

They may also behave aggressively as a result of previous experience. We won't have the time or resources to determine the cause of the aggression in our care situations. Humans are not as adept at reading horse behavior as horses are, and therefore may be oblivious to subtle signs of aggressive behavior. Trying to be "dominant" to the horse will not help you load the horse into a trailer. The following summarizes some important body language clues in horses:

Ears:

- Turned out to the side: asleep or relaxed; may not be attuned to what's going on around him
- Turned back: pointed backward but not pinned- often means he's listening to something behind him; may be deciding whether to run away or turn around and check out the sound. When combined with a swishing tail or other signs of tension in the body, turned-back ears may be a precursor to pinned ears

- Rapidly swiveling: flicking back and forth indicates a heightened state of anxiety or alertness; may be trying to locate the source of a frightening sound or smell, or may be overwhelmed by too many stimuli

Head Carriage:

- Lowered/ dropped head: relaxed and feeling good; ears will often hang to the side
- Elevated: focused on something in the distance; probably trying to figure out whether he should flee, investigate or ignore it
- Snaking: lowering the head slightly and waving the neck from side to side is an aggressive act, often used by stallions who are fighting or herding an uncooperative mare

Forelegs:

- Standing splayed: front legs spread out to the sides and leaning back a little. When scared, he may be seconds away from a spook or bolt. Injuries or health issues, such as weakness from malnutrition or neurological impairment, can also cause splaying
- Pawing: may indicate boredom, anxiety and stress. Pawing to indicate anger is rarer, but possible. This pawing is more forceful and is often combined with pinned ears and often precedes a charge or attack.
- Stomping: raising and lowering a foot forcefully in place; indicates irritation. May be minor, but may also indicate frustration with something and if you don't address it, he may resort to stronger signals.
- Striking: forceful, forward kick with a front leg that can be either aggressive or defensive. If the horse rears and strikes your head, he can kill you easily. Horses rarely strike without warning, such as stomping or pawing, wide eyes, an elevated head or pinned ears.

Hind Legs:

- Cocked: rests the leading edge of the hoof on the ground and drops his hip. When combined with a lowered head or ears hanging to the side, horse is relaxed/resting. May shift his weight, but if he shifts his weight rapidly from one foot to the other, this may indicate pain. A horse may also cock a hind hoof when he is irritated or defensive and considering kicking. In that case, he may also elevate his head and turn his ears back, and he may be looking back over his shoulder to keep an eye on the perceived threat.
- Raised: may lift a hind leg off the ground to signal irritation. Could be as minor as a horsefly, or it could be that he's annoyed with a horse or person behind him and is threatening to kick.

Muzzle:

- Drooping lip or slack mouth: standing quietly with his lower lip drooping. Usually relaxing or even asleep. If it persists while he's alert, he may have an injury or a neurological problem
- Chewing: chewing when he's not eating. Indicates he's relaxed and thinking.
- Clacking teeth: a foal will sometimes raise his neck, push his head forward, curl his lips and click his teeth together. This is how the foal tells other horses, he is young and not a threat. Most often seen in foals and weanlings and occasionally among more submissive yearlings. Usually stops by the time they're 2 or 3 years old.
- Flehmen: raises his head, curls his upper lip, breathes in and blows air back out. This allows him to push the scent particles through a structure in his nose called the vomeronasal organ (VNO). The VNO enables horses to better detect chemicals in the air, often pheromones emitted by sexually receptive horses. You most often see stallions flehmen when they're determining whether a mare is in heat and ready to breed, but all horses will do this when they smell something unusual and they're trying to get more information.
- Flared nostrils: if not from exercise, a horse's nostrils may flare and even quiver when he is startled or nervous. This is one of those quieter communications that can develop into something more serious if you don't take heed.
- Tight, pinched or pursed mouth or muzzle: subtle sign. Indicates worry, stress or fear
- Gaping mouth with visible teeth: can signal different things, depending on the context. If the horse also pins his ears and you can see white around his eyes, he's angry and probably seconds away from biting. Other medical conditions may cause a gaping mouth.

Eyes:

- Tension: tightening of the muscles around the eyes is a sign of stress, fear or discomfort. You may see this as a wrinkled upper eyelid or tightness at the corner of the eye.
- Rapid darting: scared and looking for a way to escape. May precede a spook or bolt.
- Whites of the eyes showing: the white portion of the eyeball surrounding the cornea is always visible in some horses, especially in Appaloosas and pintos with lots of white on their faces. In other horses, the sclera is exposed when they are startled or alarmed.

Tail:

- Raised or "flagged:" tail carried above the level of the back. Sign of excitement. Often associated with Arabians, but any horse will do it if he's energized enough. A horse who is flagging his tail isn't paying much attention to you and is prone to spooking, bucking or bolting.
- Clamped down: tail pressed down, hindquarters may be tucked. Horse is nervous or stressed.
- Rapid swishing: slow slapping is usually about fly control. If tail is jerking quickly from side to side or up and down, he is irritated or angry. Often a warning that he's about to kick or buck.

Whole Body:

- Tension: muscles are rigid and movements are stiff Indicates pain, nervousness or stress.
- Trembling: shaking is almost always a sign of fear. A scared or nervous horse may be on the verge of either running away or fighting to protect himself.
- Touching you: reaching out to touch you with his muzzle. Could be trying to nip or bite you or is curious and checking you out. May be nervous and needs reassurance
- Swinging hindquarters: usually a warning that he's about to kick. His ears may be back, may be wringing the tail, and body will be tense. A mare in heat will also swing her rump slightly from side to side, trying to get the attention of any stallions that might be around. She'll also likely raise her tail and turn it to one side, and she may urinate a little

Training Sheet- Aggressive Animals

If you encounter an aggressive animal, contact an Animal Control Officer.

If you encounter an aggressive dog:

- Read the body language.
- Be calm.
- If you are approaching the dog, stop moving immediately.
 - If you continue towards an already agitated dog, you're communicating that you're not backing down.
- Never punish aggressive behavior or act aggressive back
 - If you scream, yell, or stick your face in a dog's face while he's growling, snarling or snapping, this will cause you to appear more of a threat and the dog's response will be to escalate its warning or attack.
- Try to decrease the tension by pausing, slightly turning your head, lower your gaze, and relax your body while remaining still.
 - Looking directly in a dog's eyes is perceived as a threat to them.
- You may have to back away slowly to remove yourself from the scene Do not turn your back, run, scream, or make sudden movement which might agitate the dog or elicit a predator response.
- If you can safely get a leash or a control pole around the dog's neck (and front leg if possible) that may give you enough control to evacuate the dog.

If you encounter an aggressive cat:

- Speak calmly and quietly.
- If time allows, wait until the cat calms down.
- Cautiously attempt to touch the cat.
- Pick up the cat by the scruff of the neck if it is frightened.
 - If the cat appears aggressive and scared, you can attempt to gently pick it up by the scruff of the neck, supporting its back feet with your other hand. This may calm the cat and allow you to control it.
 - You should not use this technique on an adult cat (over 6 months)
 - In many cases, picking a cat up by the scruff of the neck will restrict its ability to breathe and only make it more aggressive
 - Some experts recommend never picking a cat up by the scruff of the neck

If you cannot pick the cat up:

- Wear appropriate protective clothing.
- Place a towel or heavy blanket over the cat.
- Wrap the cat and pick it up.
- Take the cat to a safe location, place in carrier or in pillowcase for transport.

- A net and something to slide under for support may be needed if you can get close enough safely

Horses:

- If asleep or relaxed- make some noise, and don't approach until he turns his head or otherwise indicates that he's paying attention to you.
 - Ears turned back (not pinned)- listening to something behind him- make some noise to alert him to your presence. If combined with a swishing tail or other signs of tension in the body, turned-back ears may be a precursor to pinned ears.
 - If focused on something in the distance-realize that he is not paying attention to you so regain his focus to prevent a reaction.
 - Excited horse- raised tail- isn't paying much attention to you, and he's probably prone to spooking, bucking or bolting.
 - Irritated horse—stomping or cocked hind hoof when not relaxed may indicate frustration with something you are doing, and if you don't address it, he may resort to stronger signals. Steer clear of his back end and move him forward and away from whatever is bothering him
 - Startled or nervous- flared nostrils at rest, tight pinched muzzle, rapidly swiveling ears-- remove him from the situation or help him work through the stress or fear so he won't resort to "louder" messages like biting or running away
 - Fearful or stressed- tension around the muzzle or eyes, darting eyes, whites of the eyes showing, clamped tail, trembling or full body tension-- stop what you are doing and give the horse a few minutes to calm down. When relaxed, try again. Be quiet and calm with him, and he'll pick up on your attitude. Remove him from the situation or calm him down to keep yourself safe
 - If about to bolt- splayed front legs, leaning back -get out of the way
 - Pawing forcefully in a loose horse- get out of his way and make sure you're not between him and another horse who may be the source of his aggression. In a horse who is tied or in hand, move other horses away, correct him with a sharp "No," then refocus his attention by moving him from the area.
 - Angry horse- pinned ears, whites of the eyes showing, gaping mouth with teeth showing, tail swishing rapidly up/down or side to side, swinging hind quarters, snaking head back and forth - ascertain why the horse is aggressive and defuse the situation. You may have to move out of his way immediately to avoid being hurt or move him away from whatever he's mad at if safe to do so and refocus his attention. Striking- aggressive or defensive- is a dangerous action. Horses rarely strike without warning, such as stomping or pawing, wide eyes, an elevated head or pinned ears so listen to those signals so that you can change the horse's focus or prepare for worsening behavior.
- Related Documents Attached: n/a