AKC Canine Clubs-Community Dogs: Week 1 Lesson

Introduction

- Introduce yourself and your dog (talk about what that dog is specifically trained for) (5 min)
  - Example Dog: (Your trained service dog). Does anyone know what that is?
    - What your dog is trained to do to assist humans.
    - He/She is in-training. That means he/she is learning, just like all of you. I need your help to help [Dog’s name] eventually help someone else.
    - Etiquette around the dog: When the vest is on, the dog is working. We do not want to distract him/her from doing their job. Just like if you were working on something, you wouldn’t want someone always distracting you. So please no petting or trying to get the dog’s attention. When it’s your turn to work with the dog, you won’t want anyone distracting them either.

- What’s the difference between a service dog, therapy dog, and pet dog? Ask for students to answer. Define the differences. Write the definitions on the board.
  - Service Dog: Dog is trained to perform tasks that help an individual with a disability. Dog has access to all public places. Training often 1-2 years.
  - Therapy Dog: Dog provides comfort to people. Dog has some access to schools, hospitals, nursing homes with permission. People train their pet dogs to pass a test showing their dog is well-behaved before bringing the dog into these places.
  - Pet Dog: Dog stays at home, is loved and likes to play, but is not necessarily trained for a specific purpose.

- Ice Breaker (10 min): Sit in a circle. Go around and each person says their name and tells a short story about a positive experience they’ve had with a dog.6

- PowerPoint about Body Language (10 min)
  - Dogs are an open book. They don’t lie. They tell you everything you need to know with their body language. You just have to know how to read them.
  - Power point going over each part with visual examples showing the body language. Stress the importance of taking the pieces of the puzzle— the different body cues—and put them together to tell how the dog is feeling. At the end of the power point, use a few examples of body language, and individual students will identify different pieces of body language the dog is exhibiting in the picture. Ask all students to respond in unison telling me whether that dog would be friendly or not.
  - Body Posture. Tense, rigid body=beware. Relaxed and curved body=friendly.
• Fur. When a dog’s hackles are raised it doesn’t necessarily mean the dog is aggressive. If just the hair behind the shoulders stands up, this means the dog is excited or nervous but not necessarily aggressive. When the hair goes up all the way down the back to the base of the tail, then the dog is being territorial or dominant and may become aggressive.
  ○ Stress. What are a few things that stress you out? (Ask students to answer. Probably get some answers like school, parents, etc.) Dogs get stressed out, too. Dogs indicate stress by: licking their lips, pacing, whining, scratching, shaking.
  ○ Tail
    • The height of the tail indicates how the dog is feeling. If the tail is tall and erect, it often means the dog is being aggressive or territorial, both of which we want to avoid. A tail between the dog’s legs indicates fear. We want the happy medium - a relaxed tail not held high or low, but in the middle.
    • The direction a dog’s tail wags also indicates how they are feeling. If a dog’s tail wags more to the right, he is feeling happy. If the dog’s tail wags more to the left, he/she is nervous or scared. If a dog is telling you he is nervous or scared, give the dog plenty of space or don’t approach at all.
  ○ Ears. If a dog’s ears are pushed forward on their head and paired with other threatening behavior, this is aggressive behavior. But there is a difference between a dog being alert and interested in something versus a dog being aggressive. Ears perked does not mean the dog aggressive. Only when the ears are pushed forward on the head. If a dog’s ears are pushed back and tight to his head, this is submission, though it can mean fear and insecurity as well. The best is when a dog’s ears are relaxed, but we want to make sure we are paying attention to other signs the dog is exhibiting to get a full picture.
  ○ Vocalizations. Just because a dog is barking doesn’t mean they are a threat. Dogs bark when they are excited, scared, angry, playing. If they are snarling, then you want to be careful.
  ○ Fear. A fearful dog can be more dangerous than an aggressive dog, because a fearful dog is unpredictable. Important to use caution with fearful dogs.
  ○ Videos of a couple dogs as examples. Ask students what body language we talked about are present in the different examples (exercise detailed above).

• Greetings (15 min)
  ○ Choose two student volunteers. Tell student A they are meeting student B for the first time. Ask student A to demonstrate how they would greet student B. (Probably a hand shake or a wave, “hello,” etc.) Thank them for the demonstration, ask them to sit down.
  • Addressing group: If I just met you, would you scratch me behind the ear? Kiss me on the head? Put your fist in my face? Scream in my face “oh my goodness, you are so cute!” (Demonstrate ways people improperly
approach a new dog.) No.

- When greeting a dog, we want to be as non-threatening as possible.
  - Crouch down/squat. Most dogs are not as big as you or me. Imagine if you are a little Chihuahua and you see me approaching you, towering over you. I look like a giant. I’d be pretty scared of me if I were that Chihuahua. So we want to crouch down (demonstrate) too look less intimidating.
  - Avoid direct eye contact and confrontational body posture. Don’t face the dog directly. Turn slightly away from the dog and don’t stare at the dog. If I stared at you (demonstrate) you might feel threatened, too.
  - Let the dog approach you. How would you like it if a stranger came into your personal space? I know I would be scared. So let the dog approach you. Give the dog a few feet of space.
  - A lot of people think you greet a dog by sticking out a fist for the dog to sniff. This isn’t wrong, but we have to be careful about where we place our fist. Would you like it if I shoved my fist in your face? Stick your fist out, but not in the dog’s face. Let the dog approach you to sniff your hand instead.
  - Energy. Be calm. Don’t make any sudden or suspicious movements. If you are going to talk to the dog, talk in a calm, soothing tone that will reassure the dog rather than scare him.
  - Petting. When the dog approaches you, let him sniff you for a second, and then start by scratching him under the chin or on the side. If you go over his body and pet him on his head, this can be seen as threatening. If the dog seems friendly and comfortable with being petted under the chin or on the side, then you can move to petting the dog’s head and ears. If the dog shies away from you when you go to pet his head, give the dog his space and avoid petting his head at this point. When petting the dog’s side, make sure your movements are slow and deliberate so you don’t scare the dog.
  - What’s the first thing we always do before petting a dog? ASK.
  - Practice. Everyone gets the chance to practice greeting the dog.

- If there is time, students can practice being excited when greeting the dog to test the dog on being calm during a greeting.

- Take-Home Sheet