

Playgroup Guidelines & Responsibilities

A minimum of three volunteers/staff are required to run a playgroup including a Lead Handler (LH), Yard Assistant (YA), and runner. It is the responsibility of the LH to supervise all aspects of playgroup operations. Follow LH's instruction at all times. BCAS Manager must approve playgroups during inclement weather.

Responsibilities of the Lead Handler (LH):

1. Bring printout of playgroup worksheet notes (https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1qV_BBwr3i5CkwJBjkqQI9unSbn9DNF3WYW5RusfkcHU/edit#gid=0). The spreadsheet sorted by play style allows LH to determine which dogs are a good mix more quickly. **Note:** refer to printing instruction on last page of this document.
2. Sign-out a Play Yard and 2 Hand Held Radio from the office and include the names of each LH, YA and runner. One of the hand-held radios should be retained by the LH or YA on their person for ready access in the event of any issues. The second hand-held radio will be attached to the fence for easy access by the runner(s).
3. If using the main yard, ensure all dogs surrounding the yard are on the inside portion of their kennels during the whole playgroup session.
4. Radio the office to alert the staff that a playgroup is in session in main yard or yards away from the shelter.
5. Select the dogs for each playgroup by play style (see playgroup worksheet notes). Use your helper dogs to read new dogs being added to a group. **When in doubt MUZZLE! When pit bulls are participating in playgroups, the LH should have a brake sticks on their person.**
6. Continuously monitor dogs, YA, runner, and safety measures. Provide direction and guidance to YA, and runner(s) during playgroup activities.
7. When introducing a dog into the yard, focus on him/her and monitor for changes in the energy of the dogs already in the yard.
8. Always respond cautiously and in a timely manner to all dog aggression. Utilize proper deterrent techniques (muzzling, shake-cans, spray bottles, etc.).
9. Remove any dog that provokes negative responses that lead to animal aggression from the play yard.
10. Immediately report safety issues, bites, scratches, or animals fights to BCAS Front Office Management.
11. Ensure someone (LH, YA or Admin) updates the google worksheet using the notes from the playgroup session. Play-Group results must be continually documented for Quality Improvement.

Responsibilities of the Yard Assistant (YA):

1. Get the playgroup tubs (feed room off the blue section on the top shelf of the metal racks). Place tub on the bench so that the dogs don't urinate on it.
2. Clear the yard of all toys.
3. Hang ample leashes, collars, squirt bottles, shake-cans, interrupters, and muzzles on the catch pen.
4. Fill tub with water.
5. Pooper scooper the yard.
6. At the discretion of the LH, the YA may be asked to retain the hand-held radio on their person.
7. **When pit bulls are participating in playgroups, the YA should have a brake stick on their person.**
8. At the end of the session, pack all supplies in the playgroup tubs and return it to the feed room shelf.

Responsibilities of the Runner(s):

1. Walk the dog that the LH requests to the yard. If possible, allow time for the dog to eliminate before entering the play yard.

2. Confirm on the chart that the dog has been cleared to participate by BCAS Vet Staff & Management. **Dogs that have not had their medical exam cannot go in play groups.**
3. Keep the leash soft during the barrier greeting in the catch pen. Do not handle the catch pen gate or enter the yard unless directed to do so by LH. Remember to hold the leash like a handle, not a bracelet.
4. If a conflict occurs and LH asks for help, remove extraneous dogs from the yard to minimize the number of dogs engaged in the conflict and safety of the handlers. If necessary, contact the office using the hand-held radio to obtain assistance.
5. Return any dog that provoked negative responses that led to animal aggression to the outdoor section of their kennel to 'cool down'.
6. Return the dog to its kennel and write on the volunteer activity sheet that the dog was in a playgroup. To avoid confusion if more than one runner is assisting, it is preferable that the same runner who removed the dog be responsible for returning the dog to its kennel.

Responsibilities of the Administrative Assistant:

1. Take notes on the dogs during playgroups.
2. Categorize their style of play (Gentle & Dainty, Rough & Rowdy, Push & Pull, Seek & Destroy) with help from LH, names of dogs they played with, and any issues. The only notes necessary for Smalls are for dogs who can be difficult.
3. Volunteers should update the spreadsheet at home. If unable to do this, ask office staff to scan your playgroup notes and email your playgroup notes to Penny.

Requirements for New Playgroup Volunteers:

- **Willingness to participate in playgroups at least twice per month.**
- Administrative Assistant: Green dog walker. All volunteers who are new to playgroups will take notes at least once before they can advance to runner.
- Runner: Volunteer permitted to walk yellow-rated dogs. Runners must perform this role during at least 8 playgroup sessions before being mentored in the yard
- YA: Volunteers must be mentored in this role (i.e., shadow the acting YA) during at least 4 playgroup sessions before they may assume this role.
- LH: Volunteers must be mentored in this role (i.e., shadow the acting LH) during at least 4 playgroup sessions. After this time, the LH (mentor) will determine if the volunteer may assume this role or if additional observation is required.

Play Styles:

Smalls: dogs 30 lbs or less

Gentle & Dainty (Wimpy): Mutual, quiet play with frequent stops and starts. Easily become nervous with rough play.

Rough & Rowdy (WWE): Mainly mutual play that is noisy and very physical, i.e., grabbing and holding, chasing and tumbling. This type of play escalates and de-escalates and can trigger conflict.

Push & Pull (Herding): Sometimes mutual; this play style involves chasing, driving, heeling and can be noisy. This play style can be antagonistic to others, escalate, and end in conflict.

Seek & Destroy (Hunting): This play style may not appear mutual and is rooted in the prey drive. It is often noisy (growling and squealing) and can escalate and require handler intervention. It can be provocative to others.

Compatible Play Styles*

1. Generally, dogs with the same play styles do well together.

2. Push & Pulls and Seek & Destroys also tend to do well together (similar language).

***Remember that Rough & Rowdy and Push & Pull combinations can be combustible!**

Maximum Number of Dogs in the Yard at one time in each Playgroup:

- 10 small dogs
- 8 Gentle & Dainty dogs
- 2:1 ratio (2 dogs per volunteer during session), e.g. 6 dogs:3 vols, etc. mid-level dogs with play styles other than Gentle & Dainty
- 2 challenging dogs (use a helper dog of opposite sex when introducing a brand-new dog to play groups)

Worksheet Printing Instructions

- select/highlight the area you want to print (via your mouse or hold shift using up/down arrows)
- after the area is selected, click the printer icon or hold down Ctrl + P
- under Options make sure to (1) select Selection and (2) check Repeat row headers on each page
- Paper: size 8.5 x 11
- Layout: select Fit to width and Landscape

Playgroup Schedule

1. Play Groups may operate on the follow days & times in the yards away from the shelter

- Monday: 11:30am-3:30pm (Volunteer Lead Handler)
- Tuesday: 11:30 am – 3:30 pm (Volunteer Lead Handler)
- Wednesday: 11:30am-3:30pm (Volunteer Lead Handler)
- Thursday: 11:30 am – 6:45 pm (Volunteer Lead Handler) Note: move to old yard when dark during winter season.
- Friday: 11:30 am – 3:30 pm (Volunteer Lead Handler)
- Saturday: 11:30am – 3:30pm (Volunteer Lead Handler)
- Sunday: 11:30am – 3:30pm (Volunteer Lead Handler)

Playgroup Restrictions

- 1. ONLY Animals cleared by BCAS Vet Staff and Shelter Manager can participate:**
- a. It is very IMPORTANT they are medically cleared to join the playgroup*
 - b. Wait 7 days after spay/neuter surgery for playgroup participation*

2. **Any BCAS Animal still on Stray Time CANNOT participate:**
 - a. *Animals will only be cleared following completion of BCAS Stray Time (arrival date + 7 days, e.g. arrived 9/23/14 + 7 = 9/30/14 no longer on stray time)*
 - b. *Animal Completing Stray Time must still be cleared by BCAS Manager or Vet Staff*

3. **Before any BCAS Animal can participate in Play-Groups:**
 - a. *Animal must be cleared to participate by BCAS Vet Staff & Manager*
 - b. *Animal should be placed into a Play-Group Category:*
 - *Rough & Rowdy*
 - *Gentle & Dainty*
 - *Push & Pull*
 - *Seek & Destroy*
 - c. *Animal must be walked before entering Play Yard*

4. **BCAS Staff & Volunteers must follow Play-Group Guidelines at all times:**
 - a. *Failure to follow guidelines could result in dismissal from Play-Group activities, or administrative action*