

# Behavioral Terminology

Description of Behavioral Terminology as defined by the Behavior Department at Austin Pets Alive!.

## Resource Guarding (RG)

- A broad spectrum term that means showing possessive, or “guarding,” behavior over any object. Guarding food and/or edible objects can be defined as “food guarding.” When guarding behavior occurs towards a variety of objects, not specifically only food or toys, it may be referred to as “Generalized Guarding.” An easy way to describe resource guarding towards the public is that “the dog doesn’t like to share.”
- This behavior may present itself towards other animals, people or both. However, showing resource guarding towards one is not indicative of the other. EX: A dog showing food guarding towards another animal in the household is **not** guaranteed to show guarding towards a human in the house.
- Looks like:
  - *Minor:* hunkering over the item, wide eyes, lip curling, growling, snapping, potentially leading up to biting if all above signals are ignored. Will usually show this only if being interacted with while dog is engaging with food/object.
  - *Moderate:* behavior is similar to listed above, but the dog will be showing more intensity of the behavior and is faster to progress to utilizing their mouth. The dog may also begin to display this behavior towards the person and/or animal when they are at a greater distance from the food/object being guarded.
  - *Severe:* the dog will quickly utilize their mouth and may forego all other warning signals, or show them very briefly prior to aggression. The dog may potentially travel away from the food/object they are guarding to threaten or aggress onto an animal or person.
- Home Setup:
  - All dogs will need boundaries in their home and may need to be restricted in their access to certain items (rawhides/toys/etc) and potential adopters will need to be consulted on management techniques.
  - *Resource Guarding towards humans:*
    - *Minor:* food guarding towards people can be managed relatively easily at this stage. Not recommended for a home with children under 5, but can be discussed if there are not multiple young children, nor any other guarding tendencies other than specifically when the dog is eating. The behavior of the adults with their children must also be considered in this circumstance. *Exercises for adopters: trading, separate at feeding.*
    - *Moderate:* for safety, behavior team will need to give approval of any adoption with children in the home under the age of twelve. *Exercises for adopters: tie downs, CSD protocols, separate when feeding, trading.*
    - *Severe:* will need restrictions specifically set by the behavior department. Typically, this will need to be an adult only home, and pre-adopt training may be required due to severity.

- *Resource Guarding towards animals:*
  - *Minor:* dogs will need to be separated at feeding time and should not be given high value objects (bones, rawhides, etc.) in the same room unless contained away from each other. Case by case basis on if the dog will guard their toys, but will need to be monitored when interacting with items. *Exercises for adopters: tandem tie downs, supervised play time, dog-dog management, separated feeding.*
  - *Moderate:* depending on the individual dog, this dog might do best as the only animal in the home. Consult with the behavior department on the severity and restrictions, if any.
  - *Severe:* restrictions will be specifically set by the behavior department. More than likely needs to be the only animal in the home.

## **Territorial Aggression**

- A term that indicates the dog is showing protective behavior over an area, not an object, they have deemed their "territory." This can be a variety of places, the most common being the home, a yard, or a vehicle. An easy way to explain this to the public is, "not that great at welcoming guests."
- May display a variety of behaviors depending on the severity of protectiveness ranging from discomfort to aggression when new people and/or animals enter or approach the established territory.
- This behavior may not present itself if the adopter is not inside of the home when guests visit or may worsen within their presence. This component is specific to the individual dog and can vary greatly from one case to the next.
- Looks like:
  - *Minor:* barking or growling at a new person entering the established territory (home, yard, etc), may potentially snap at or minorly bite a person who is attempting to pet or interact with the dog. May try to avoid the person initially. Could progress to light nips on the back of the leg as a person is moving around the space. Can appear defensive in nature.
  - *Moderate:* behavior is similar to listed above, but the dog will be showing more intensity of the behavior and is faster to progress to utilizing their mouth. The dog is more than likely approaching the person on their own, and are more likely to show follow through on these behaviors. The chance of a bite occurring if this behavior goes unmanaged is increased.
  - *Severe:* the dog will quickly go to utilize their mouth and may forego all other warning signals, or show them very briefly prior to aggression. The dog will travel an undefined distance or continue to show aggression until the individual leaves. This dog will bite a stranger who enters their defined territory, and may not show much of a willingness to accept people outside of the established family unit. Will more than likely need lifetime management.
- Home Setup/Management:
  - All territorial dogs will benefit from a home with minimal visitors and will typically require a structured process for meeting new people or animals entering the space. This can range from a quick introduction outside of the established territory, to continued heavily managed introductions over an undetermined number of visits. Due to the structure needed it is best to not have unannounced visitors stopping by as they please, and will instead require structured visits in order to best manage these behaviors.
  - *Minor:* Dog will need slow/cautious, controlled introductions to visitors (people or animals) within the territory. Introduction techniques vary by dog, but can include

tandem walks outside the territory with the visitor, tie-downs, draglines, counter conditioning the presence of the new person, separating/crating in another room or space.

- *Moderate:* the dog will likely need similar introduction protocols put into place as a dog displaying minor territorial behavior, but will need a more structured introduction with a slower breakdown of techniques for new people. This could also take more than one meeting, and will vary based on the individual dog. A muzzle might be necessary to begin the introductions, but can likely be transitioned off successfully. *Additional Home Set-Up/Management:* Apartments with no shared spaces (i.e. hallways, multi-floor stairwells with no exits, elevators or open multi-family yards). Not recommended for a home with young children due to lifestyle, must be a discussion with behavior department. All individuals in the home must meet the dog.
- *Severe:* This particular dog will struggle accepting an animal or human that is not already established into their territory. Severe territorial behavior will need the structured introduction protocols as listed above, but may need several visits in order to be successful. However, depending on the extreme severity, there is a possibility that this dog will be unable to accept a new individual within their established territory. *Additional Home Set-Up/Management:* This dog might do best living in a house only, or a first to second floor apartment with minimal foot traffic. Behavior Department might add additional restrictions, as needed. Typically, this will need to be an adult only home and pre-adopt training may be required due to severity. All individuals expected to interact with the dog might need to be present to meet the dog.

## Handler Guarding

- Could be considered a subcategory of both resource guarding and/or territorial behavior. While the behaviors can look similar, a dog may display handler protection, but not territorial behavior, and vice versa. May be comfortable with people who enter their home, but show threatening behavior when a person attempts to engage with or approach “their” person both inside and outside of the home setting.
- Looks like:
  - *Minor:* barking or growling at a person who engages or approaches the handler, may potentially snap at or minorly bite a person who approaching or attempting to interact with the handler and/or dog. May avoid the person initially. Could progress to light nips on the back of the leg if the person is moving around the handler.
  - *Moderate:* behavior is similar to listed above, but the dog will be showing more intensity of the behavior and is faster to progress to utilizing their mouth. The dog is more than likely approaching the person on their own to show follow through on these behaviors. This intensity of the vocalizations may be increased when on leash due to increased frustration and/or being “tethered” beside their person.
  - *Severe:* the dog will quickly utilize their mouth and may forego all other warning signals, or show them very briefly prior to aggression. The dog will travel an undefined distance or continue to show aggression until the individual leaves. This dog will bite a stranger who approaches or is in a close enough vicinity to their handler, and may not necessarily show a willingness to easily accept people outside of the established handlers. Will more than likely need lifetime management.
- Home Setup:
  - Handler protective dogs will typically require a process for meeting new people. This dog is typically not recommended for public settings where there are a lot of people in close proximity (patio restaurants, bars, coffee shops, farmers market, etc.) This type of dog would do best living in a home with adults only.

- Dog may show guarding of a person they are more attached to (can be considered a “higher value resource”) toward people they know but with whom they do not have a strong relationship with. In a home with multiple people, responsibilities should be split between the individuals.
- *Minor:* Dog will need slow, controlled introductions. Introduction techniques vary by dog, but can include tandem walks with the owner, tie-downs in the home, drag lines on the dog, “Check it out” drills, and management technique of just separating/crating in another room with visitors.
- *Moderate:* All of the above techniques apply for introductions, but additional restrictions may be placed on this dog. *Additional Home Set-Up/Management:* Apartments with no shared spaces (i.e. hallways, multi-floor stairwells with no exits, elevators or open multi-family yards). Not recommended for a home with multiple roommates due to lifestyle, must be a discussion with behavior department. All individuals in the home must meet the dog.
- *Severe:* Restrictions on this dog will be set by the Behavior Department. This dog might do best living in a house only, or a first to second floor apartment with minimal foot traffic. Pre-adopt training may be required due to severity. All individuals expected to interact with the dog will need to meet the dog.

## Separation Anxiety (SA)

- Separation Anxiety is a complex issue that can have many levels and variables that compound it. Typically, a dog with Separation Anxiety will display a dramatic response within a short time of their owner leaving. This can range in intensity, depending on the dog or the length of time that the dog is left alone.
- It is important to note that most symptoms of boredom share characteristics with minor separation anxiety, but dogs who are bored might display these behaviors less consistently. Addressing boredom first could eliminate the unwanted behavior. The most common of these behaviors are: chewing or knocking down easily accessible items, and howling, barking and/or crying.
- Looks like:
  - *Minor:* May show signs of anxiety (pacing, drooling, whining) when the owner is preparing to leave the house but has not left yet. May whine, bark, or excessively pace when the owners immediately leave the home but will settle down after <15 minutes. They might show some minor destructive behaviors (chewing shoes, pillows, other things that aren’t toys) if left free roaming. Might display some minor house training issues. Does not appear to be averse to the crate immediately.
  - *Moderate:* May show signs of anxiety (pacing, drooling, whining) when the owner is preparing to leave the house but has not left yet. Barking/howling for over 15 minutes after owner’s departure, but will eventually settle down. They will consistently chew on inappropriate items if left free roaming, and may injure themselves occasionally in the process, but typically aren’t destroying large items such as door frames or furniture. May consistently urinate/defecate indoors even if potty trained. Can be crated, but might attempt to try to break out of the crate and may cause minor injury in the process.
  - *Severe:* Shows signs of anxiety (pacing, drooling, whining) when the owner is preparing to leave the house but has not left yet. Barking/howling for almost the entire duration of being left alone. Will show destructive behavior with inappropriate items including large items like furniture, door frames, or carpets, often causing themselves bodily injury in the process of chewing on it. Can escape crates or are extremely averse to being crated. Constantly urinates/defecates when when left alone, even if potty trained.

- Home Setup:
  - Depending on the severity, we are looking for an adopter who either has a flexible schedule or is home most of the time/works from home.
  - Will need patient adopter who is willing and able to devote time to crate-training and working on the separation anxiety.
  - May need to counsel the adopter if they live in an apartment or are renting (due to possible noise complaints, destruction to rental property).
  - Depending on severity, anti-anxiety medication and/or an indestructible crate may be recommended.

### **On-leash reactivity (OLR)**

- This is a behavior that occurs usually in the form of barking towards something while the dog is on leash. This is not a necessarily an indicator of aggression, but more indicative of the dog feeling excitement, fear, arousal, and/or frustration towards said object or individual.
- When a dog is displaying on leash reactivity towards an individual, it is advised to not allow a dog to engage with them until they have shown more relaxed behavior.
- Environment can play a big factor in this dog's behavior on leash. If a dog displays this behavior in shelter environment, it does not necessarily mean they will display it while in an adoptive home.
- Some dogs display this behavior only when in close proximity to an individual or object, others at a greater distance.
- Looks like:
  - *Minor:* may lightly growl, fixate, pull, or bark towards other individuals while on leash, but is easily redirected or corrected. This reactivity may occur at short to moderate distances (10-20 feet). The dog will not show continued interest once removed.
  - *Moderate:* will more heavily pull towards dogs or people and will likely react at them by barking and growling. This dog may require the use of training gear, such as a Halti or Gentle Leader, in order to have better control. Minor Redirection onto the leash can occur. This reactivity will usually occur at moderate to significant distances (20+ feet). The dog will show some occasional continued interest once removed. *Additional Home Set-Up/Management:* This dog would do best not living in an area where the stimulus causing reactivity is high (i.e. apartments with off leash dogs, high rise stairwells, etc.) and/or where they would be expected to be in public settings around their reactivity causing stimulus. Training could significantly improve this dog's behavior.
  - *Severe:* will significantly pull towards and lunge at dogs or people on leash, barking, growling, and attempting to make contact with them. This dog will require the use of training gear such as a Halti or Gentle Leader, but might still be difficult to manage at this level. Dog may redirect onto either the leash or handler when displaying this behavior. This reactivity can occur up to extreme distances (100+ feet). This dog will be constantly on the alert with continued interest, even when removed. *Additional Home Set-Up/Management:* This dog would do best not living in an area where the stimulus causing reactivity is high (i.e. apartments with off leash dogs, high rise stairwells, etc.) and/or where they would be expected to be in public settings around their reactivity causing stimulus. This dog will need behavior team approval if going home with children.

### **Overarousal (OA)**

- When a dog displays an inappropriate level of excitement/obsession towards people and/or objects.
- Arousal towards an object is normal, but it's considered *overarousal* when the dog shows a high obsession and is difficult to diffuse or remove them from the situation.

- When a dog is in a state of overarousal, it can become difficult to diminish their behavior, and attempts to do so might be either ineffective or could further increase the behavior being displayed.
- Anxiety or stress in the shelter may cause a dog to display or develop overarousal behaviors that diminish once out of the environment. A dog may no longer enter states of overarousal once they are out of the shelter and able to decompress
- Looks like:
  - Because arousal refers to a normal state of mind, overarousal is only displayed in moderate to severe stages
  - *Moderate*: will show obsession at and a difficulty to remove from either an object or a person. This can be high jumping, "hard" mouthing, forceful humping, and strong obsession over certain objects like plastic or toys. Remains fixated on the object when removed, but can usually be walked away. *Additional Home Set-Up/Management*: If this is an obsession surrounding a novel object, management could allow not providing the object to the dog. Depending on the individual dog, children might not be recommended. This behavior could potentially be diminished altogether with the use of drag leashes, aversives and/or timeouts. Teaching additional skills such as "drop" and "leave it" are also advised.
  - *Severe*: will display similar behaviors noted above but at a much higher level of obsession. Extremely difficult to remove from the object, and will cause injury to themselves or others to access it. This dog will have restrictions placed on them by the behavior department. Adult only household will be required.

## Defensive Aggression

- A category of aggression displayed toward either humans or other animals in response of a perceived threat, or provocation. When considering the common phrase "fight, flight, or freeze," defensive aggression is considered the "fight" in these terms if the other choices have been removed
- What defines provocation or "threat" will be determined by each individual dog, and triggers can include one or more of the following:
  - Approaching the dog too quickly and/or in a loud or animated manner.
  - Confining the dog in a small space that they cannot escape such as a kennel, car, or corner of a yard/room.
  - Touching the dog in an area where they are uncomfortable or the handling is novel, such as the ears, collar, paws, tail, etc.
- Looks like:
  - *Minor*: the dog may display tense body language, wide saucer eyes, licking lips, excessive yawning, stress panting, lip curling, and attempts to avoid engaging before resorting to a growl, head whip, or snap.
  - *Moderate*: the dog may growl, head whip, or snap without first displaying other calming signals, and may progress to a bite that leaves leaving minor to moderate injuries.
  - *Severe*: the dog has shown willingness to bite and cause injury if provoked, and may forgo all other warning signals, or show them very briefly prior to aggression.
- Introductions:
  - Interactions such as petting or touch should be taken slowly. Food can be involved, but should be focused on tossing away from the person, as opposed to "bribing" to get closer.
  - Wait for the dog to solicit attention before touch and do the "consent test." This involves short, light pets, then stopping and removing hands. If they solicit more touch, you may pet more.

- For severe cases, we may ask the potential adopter not to pet or touch at all on first meeting. May take repeated visits to warm up and/or require the dog to be muzzled. Introductions should be discussed with the behavior department.
- Home Life:
  - All dogs should go home with a drag line and will need time determined by the dog to warm up to new people or animals. While training can help decrease defensive response, some dogs may never be comfortable with certain forms of touch/interaction.
  - *Defensive aggression toward humans:*
    - Dogs with a history of non-situational defensive aggression is not recommended for homes with young children due to lack of understanding of personal space and increased risk of injury.
    - May need to be muzzled at vet and/or be uncomfortable with grooming - recommend Muzzle Up Project for muzzle desensitization.
    - Although the dog may warm up to its owners quickly, it may revert back to aggressive tendencies when meeting new people so caution should be used when introducing to strangers.
    - Dogs who display any form of aggression are not recommended to go to dog parks, patios, or off leash areas.
  - *Defensive aggression toward other animals:*
    - The dog should never be left unattended with another animal in the home for at least the first 2 weeks after adoption. Crates and baby gates can be utilized to allow the dog to see, smell, and hear the other animal(s) in the home before giving them the opportunity to interact.
    - All interactions should be supervised, and adopters should be familiarized with interrupter devices (squirt bottle, shake can, pet corrector) as well as appropriate times to use them - this should be discussed during the behavior consult.
    - A dog with moderate to severe defensive aggression toward other animals, may be recommended as the only pet in the household. If this dog is approved to go home with another animal, an adult only home is recommended.

## **Offensive Aggression to Humans**

This is a dog that has shown a willingness to choose aggression over other alternative behaviors. In other words, they choose "fight" over "flight", and have gone out of their way to bite a human without provocation. This is not to be confused with Defensive Aggression, which is when a dog does not have ample opportunity to choose flight, therefore leaving them with fight being the only option. True offensive aggression to humans is quite rare, as most bites on a human are defensive in nature. Some dogs might start out as defensive, but learn over time that aggression is the most effective way to ward off threats, thus resulting in a dog that becomes offensive in their aggression as they gain confidence and reinforcement for biting.

When speaking of offensive aggression in dogs it is important to differentiate what the dog is displaying aggression towards (humans, dogs, cats, and/or prey). Oftentimes when speaking of a dog who has displayed offensive aggression, we are speaking in terms of this behavior being shown towards a human or dog. In order for a dog's aggression to be considered "offensive" it is critical to diagnose whether or not any type of provocation has been presented. Reaching for, leaning over, or touching a dog could all be considered types of provocation from a human. In the dog realm, approaching, leaning over, mounting, humping, muzzle punching, and hard staring would also be seen as forms of provocation. If none of these forms of provocation are present and a dog chooses to go out of its way to aggress upon a human and/or dog this would then be considered offensive aggression. This usually means that the dog has traversed some distance, choosing "fight" instead of "flight," towards a non-threatening stimuli such as a dog or a human. It should be noted that this behavior is rare and should not be confused with on leash or barrier reactivity as many times these specific behaviors do not provide an accurate representation of a dog's true intentions towards another human or dog. See "On Leash Reactivity" and "Defensive Aggression." When speaking of a dog's display of offensive aggression towards a human, it should be understood that APA! takes this behavior very seriously. If a dog has truly gone out of its way to sustain an attack

on a person, we would likely consider this dog not a safe candidate for our adoption program.

### **Unpredictable Aggression to Humans**

This is a dog that has shown inconsistent/random triggers for aggression on humans. While friendliness with every stranger is not a requirement, APA! cannot safely or effectively train a dog to be a safe adoption candidate if the dog is unpredictably aggressive towards humans. This mainly pertains to a dog's ability to safely form a relationship. If APA! cannot pinpoint when or why a dog reacts aggressively towards a person, that dog would be considered unpredictably aggressive, and therefore not an adoption candidate.

### **Uninterruptible Drive**

This generally pertains to a dog's reaction towards other animals (other dogs, cats, etc.), and is not simply an issue of dog aggression or prey drive. Dog aggression and prey drive are considered normal aspects of dog behavior. Uninterruptible drive is when a dog has an uncontrollable/unstoppable drive to seek out conflict with other animals. If all attempts to interrupt a dog when they are engaged in a predatory or aggressive act towards another animal fails, this dog would be classified as displaying uninterruptible drive. If APA! cannot modify or address this behavior, this dog would not be an adoption candidate.