

## 5.1.13 Dogs Policy

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### 1. Introduction

This Chapter is based on the BAAF Practice Note 42, which can be accessed on the Members Area of the BAAF's website.

Many foster carers own dogs. The practice note states:

"Adopting rigid policies in relation to households which have dogs could exclude many potential substitute families which have much more to offer children in need of family placements".

The Practice Note continues:

"Potentially dogs pose a number of dangers to children and this need to be acknowledged and guarded against. Sensible hygiene arrangements and appropriate adult supervision will eliminate or significantly reduce most risks, but there is never room for complacency".

This policy is based on the principal that the presence of a dog in a household may often benefit children placed in a number of ways. However, potential or approved foster carers must be able to demonstrate that they are responsible dog owners and must be committed to placing the welfare of any child in their care above all other considerations.

### 2. Policy

The Policy of the Department is:

To safeguard and promote the welfare of the child and to ensure that this is of paramount importance;

To objectively assess what the risks are from a specific animal;

To identify and verify the owner's arrangements for the care of the animal and the extent to which they guard against potential risks and accidents;

To seek evidence from observations and information provided by the owners, supported by evidence wherever possible, that they are responsible in their attitudes and actions as dog owners;

To identify the owner's intended actions if problems around pets were to arise once a child is placed;

To make it clear to dog owners that the burden of evidence rests with them that the animal presents no serious risk. The owner may be asked to provide a statement from a qualified Veterinary Surgeon or animal behaviourist concerning the safety of an animal which we believe may be dangerous in the company of children;

To advise potential carers that they will not be registered or approved for the care of children if they own a dog listed as dangerous in legislation, and therefore banned. The link at the end of this procedure will take you to a list of currently banned dogs.

To understand that all animals present potential risk and to ensure that owners have strategies for managing these if and when they arise.

It will be appropriate in some circumstances to seek information and advice from the Environmental Health Officer.

### **3. Risk Assessment of Dogs**

The general principles to be applied when assessing risk are as follows:

A child must never be placed in a household with a dog listed in the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 (amended in 1997), but in the case of other breeds the approach should be to assess the individual animal's temperament and characteristics, taking into account a variety of issues;

Although some dogs are defined as "dangerous" in terms of legislation and are banned, it is clear that any dog of whatever breed has the potential to be unpredictable, act on instinct or react to the way it is treated;

Workers should be cautious about ascribing general characteristics to a breed;

Workers are not expected to carry out in-depth assessments of dogs, but it will be useful for them to obtain information on certain key areas. The dog assessment form on Mosaic can be used for this; this is based in the CoramBAAF Dog Assessment Form.

Information from bodies such as the Kennel Club and relevant dog owners associations on the suitability and compatibility of children and different breeds of dogs may help in worker's assessments;

In addition to the assessment carried out on the animal, it is also important to assess the owners in terms of their ability to control the dog and the practical steps they take to minimise any potential health and safety issues relating to owning a dog.

If a more detailed assessment is considered advisable, the worker should consider approaching other organisations for further help.

A report from the veterinary surgery used by the owners may also be useful. Similarly if they have used the services of an animal behaviourist, it would be helpful to receive a report. The social worker may feel that to commission such a report, if one is not already available, may be appropriate.

## 4. When Should Assessments be Undertaken?

Assessments will be required in the following circumstances:

- At the beginning when an assessment is being undertaken, the dog assessment form will be completed.
- When an additional dog joins a fostering household, the dog assessment form will be completed.
- When a fostering household has 3 or more dogs, a referral will be made for a “Canine Temperament Assessment” to be undertaken. If this takes place prior to the foster carer being approved, the cost will be met by the fostering service. If this takes place following approval the cost will be met by the foster carers.
- Where specific concerns have been identified regarding a dog living with a foster carer, and it is considered a “Canine Temperament Assessment” would inform a risk assessment or plan.

To make a referral for a “Canine Temperament Assessment” contact Kate at Chase Canines [katescarepetservices@gmail.com](mailto:katescarepetservices@gmail.com) or ring on 07519642041. See Appendix at the end of this document for the “Canine Temperament Assessment” template.

## 5. Fostering Social Worker's Assessment

Social workers need to make an informed assessment of each animal in the household and identify the role the dog plays in relation to its owners. Owners should be expected to provide evidence wherever possible (e.g. vaccination certificate etc):

The “Dog assessment form” covers some of the following, but it may be beneficial to explore all of these areas as part of your assessment.:-

- Is the dog kept as a family pet, working dog, for breeding, guard dog etc? This may affect the owner's attitude towards the dog;
- Confirm what breed the dog is or what is known of the animal's ancestry if a cross-breed;
- How did the family acquire the dog? (e.g. from a breeder, pet shop, rescue centre etc);
- Older dogs acquired from rescue centres often have a history of neglect, ill treatment or abandonment. This may have affected the dogs behaviour;
- How long has the dog lived with the family? Is this the first home? Dogs with persistent difficulties may have been re-homed more than once. A recently acquired dog may not yet have displayed the problems which led to the re-homing;
- Who looks after the dog and is seen by the dog as "pack leader"? This person will need to be responsible for maintaining the dog's routine as far as possible when family life changes as a result of a child being placed;
- Feeding arrangements - is dog food kept out of reach of a child? Are dog utensils and human utensils kept separately? Is the dog allowed to beg when humans are eating?
- Sleeping arrangements - where does the dog sleep? For both hygiene and safety reasons it may be inadvisable for the dog to sleep at the end of the child's bed or in the child's bedroom;

- Exercise and toileting - how and when is the dog exercised? Where is the dog allowed to relieve itself and what are the "cleaning up" arrangements?
- Physical space - is there enough space within the home and garden to comfortably accommodate the dog/s and child/ren? Which areas are out-of-bounds for dogs?
- How is the dog's health addressed? Is it vaccinated and wormed regularly? Is it treated for fleas etc regularly?
- Does the home appear hygienic and free from the odour of pets?
- Observe how the dog behaves when you visit. Is it overly defensive, nervous or aggressive? Is it excessively friendly, excitable and demanding of attention? How do the owners manage this? Does the dog respond to the owner's commands? How does the owner describe the dog's temperament and behaviour to visitors, children and other dogs?
- Has the dog ever bitten any person or other animal, and in what circumstances?
- Clarify the dog's age. Older dogs may find it more difficult to cope with young children running around; younger dogs may still be unruly and boisterous;
- Explore how the family would cope if it became necessary to re-home the dog. This is of particular importance in those households where there are no children and the dog is seen as a "family member";
- If the family has more than one dog all the above questions must be asked, but it will also be important to understand how the dogs relate to each other and which is the "pack leader".

## 6. Implications to consider when placing a child

Social workers also need to encourage potential carers to consider the following:

- Is the child used to dogs? What breed/s?
- Does the child's culture view dogs in a certain light? (e.g are they considered "unclean"?)
- Does the child have a fear of dogs? All dogs or specific dogs?
- What associations do dogs have for the child?
- Has the child been known to mistreat animals?
- Does the child have any mobility difficulties, know allergies or other health issues which might make it unsafe or unsuitable for them to be placed in a dog-owning household?
- The age and vulnerability of the child at time of placement should be taken into consideration.

## 7. Conclusion

The approach of the Fostering Service to placing children within dog-owning households will be based in comprehensive assessments of:

- The potential risk posed by a specific animal;
- The owner's attitude and approach to owning a dog;
- The child's capacity to live in a household where there is a dog.

Such assessments, which should be evidence based, as far as possible, will be vital when Fostering Panels consider the applications from foster carers.

They will also be important in terms of enabling a child's social worker to consider the appropriateness of placing a child in a household where there is a dog.

The following Government website may be useful:-

[Controlling your dog in public: Overview - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/topics/dogs)

## Appendix: Canine Temperament Assessment

### Disclaimer-

You must inform us of any past or present physical or behavioural issues including bite history. All questions must be answered honestly to ensure a clear understanding of your dog's needs and the support plan to be issued.

Transparency is key, Chase Canines has the right to pass on any information to Walsall Council that may conflict with information provided on paper compared to in person.

You assume sole responsibility for your dog's behaviour, and any form of damage caused to property or person. You expressly waive and relinquish any claims against Chase Canines, the trainers are not responsible for your dog's behaviour during the assessment or following the assessment.

If at any time during the assessment, the trainers at Chase Canines reasonably believe that a dog is ill, abused, exhibiting aggressive, fearful, compulsive, anxious, phobic, or any behaviours that may interfere or endanger the health and safety of any participants or bystanders, including the dog, you agree that they may discontinue the assessment and it will be reported to Walsall Council. The dog's welfare is always paramount.

You understand that any dog has the potential to bite, and that any incidents that occur prior, during or after this assessment are your responsibility alone. Chase Canines will not take any responsibility or accept any liability.

By signing this document you are agreeing to all of the statements above-

Print name:

Signed:

Dated:

**Client details**

Name;

Address;

Telephone no.

Email address;

Age range looking to foster-

**Canine's details**

Name;

Age;

Breed;

Neutered; Y / N

Veterinary practice address;

Name;

Age;

Breed;

Neutered; Y / N

Veterinary practice address;

**Pet History**

Where did you have your dog from?

If a rescue, what assessment took place?

How long have you owned the dog?

What experience with children does the dog have?

Is the dog friendly with other animals and unknown people?

**Behaviour**

Please recount any incidents of aggression whether it be towards dogs or humans. In your description, please include the date it occurred, the events that happened before, during and after the incident (s), where the incident (s) took place, times of day they took place, who was involved, and the severity of the injury (i.e. bruising, skin marked, skin breakage, no contact made).

Please recount any incidents of fear whether it be towards dogs, objects, sounds, places or humans. In your description, please include the date it occurred, the events that happened before, during and after the incident (s), where the incident (s) took place, times of day they took place, who was involved, and the severity of the injury (i.e. bruising, skin marked, skin breakage, no contact made).

Apart from behaviours in your summary, are there any other behavioural issues or unrelated quirks your dog has?

**Please outline your dog's daily routine.**

In your outline please be specific, include meal times, walks (if they're on lead/off-lead/in a group/solo, how long they're for), enrichment (puzzle feeders, kongs etc), play (what type of play- with a dog, a raggy, a ball)

**Diet**

What is your dog currently fed daily?

Include brand names, treats used, weight, and how many times daily with rough times.

## **Medical History**

If possible, please attach a copy of your dog's medical history.

If any illnesses, what was the dog being treated for?

Was any medication prescribed?

Is the dog still taking this?

When did your dog last see the vet? Did the vet take bloods? If so what were the results? Were they within the prescribed limits?

Is the dog taking any supplements? If so, what are they and what are they treating?

Has your dog had any previous injuries, or medication throughout their life?

Is your dog up to date on vaccinations, flea and worm treatments whether natural or prescribed?

## **Is the animal welfare act 2006 being met?**

- |   |        |
|---|--------|
| <input type="radio"/> Access to clean water and food      | Yes/No |
| <input type="radio"/> Freedom from fear                   | Yes/No |
| <input type="radio"/> Adequate medical care               | Yes/No |
| <input type="radio"/> Comfortable bedding                 | Yes/No |
| <input type="radio"/> Freedom to express normal behaviour | Yes/No |
| <input type="radio"/> Clean environment                   | Yes/No |

**How did the dog react to a stranger entering-**

**How did the dog react having toys/food removed-**

**How did the dog react to touch-**

**How did the dog react to loud noises or targeted noises -**

## **Overview-**

(Include suitable age range, 'type' of child personality etc)