

# Play Cage Protocol

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*Water: must be clean in all play cages pool cleaned at least once a day during the summer months and water buckets checked frequently throughout the day. All seasons*

*Poop scooping must be done in-between changing the dogs around. Don't put dogs into dirty runs*

## **Putting dogs into play cages**

- All medical protocols must have been met
- The dog is not dangerous to other dogs (to the best of your knowledge)
- Evaluating testing may or may not have been done, but dog is free of any parasites
- Dog should be fitted to **Gentle Leader (G/L)** or **Sensation Harness** after its first day or two at the shelter.

You do not have to attach the leash to the G/L, but it should be put on. After three days of being brought in and out you can start clipping the G/L and collar together. If using Sensation Harness this must be attached to the martingale collar too (for safety).

When it is decided that a dog can go into the play cage the kennel staff person must put the G/L on the dog.

**The wrap:** If dog is big and wants to drag you, then wrap the lead around the dogs middle and bring the end of the lead back through the collar – creating a belly wrap. (If the dog is shy, be careful that you don't add to its fear by doing this.) *Make sure you leave a leash attached to any shy dog even in the play cage and in its kennel.*

- **Walking** the dog to the play cage. Make sure the dog doesn't drag you to the cage or anywhere else. Think - Red light: STOP WALKING or Green light: Walk Forward. Keep walking forward if dog isn't pulling and then back up or stop when dog forgets and starts pulling. Using Premack principles. Have treats on you to reinforce for walking next to you. Stop outside and see if the dog wants to pee immediately, and then continue to the play cage. If you are just leash walking this dog, do the same and just stop at a certain spot and allow the dog to sniff and do its business. Give this behavior a name like "Go Potty". Use the same phrase for each dog.
- **Shy dogs:** Shy dogs are afraid and will shut down. They freeze or lie down when you try to walk them on the leash. If the dog is small enough stop walking and pick this dog up (if this is going to intimidate it). If they are too big to pick up, then try tapping the side of your leg encouragingly, while being sure your body is not facing the dog. (If you turn and face the dog he will stop

moving forward). Get down low and sideways to the dog and sweetly encourage the dog to follow you. If you have a nice smelling treat then use this to lure the dog to where you want to go. You can hold the treat and lure or you drop the treat on the ground and let the dog walk up to get it. Make sure as you are leaving the kennel that the dog is NOT next to all the dogs in their kennels. For the shy dogs walking out next to all the kennelled dogs is very scary and for the assertive dogs walking next to the kennels gets them barking or even growling. So always put yourself between the kennels and the dog you are walking.

- **Placing the dog into the play cage:** Once you have entered the play cage begin by just walking the dog around. When the dog has walked all around with you, drop the leash and let the dog drag it as the dog explores on its own. You should stay in the cage and observe (and pick up poop). Then if all is going well and you think the dog will come back to you, take the leash off. If the dog won't come back, just leave a long line or leash on the dog.
- **First observation:** For a few times, leave the dog in the play cage by itself. Don't leave immediately, instead watch the dog. See if he is going to try to find a way out. How is he interacting with the dog(s) in the other pens? How does the dog interact with you? Work on calling the dog to you and reinforcing it with food, play, hugs and/or pats. Keep a written record of what you see these first few days. Don't wait to record what you see
- **Who is this dog socially?** Once you think you have an idea of who this dog is socially – aloof, playful, really interested in other dogs - then you should consider what other shelter dogs he might be good with. Start by walking the two dogs side by side on leash. Do the dogs seem to be happy with each other? If so then take them both into an empty cage. Leave the most active dog on lead for a while till you are sure they are going to be ok.
- **Placing into a playgroup:** Stay and observe. Once you know more about this new dog you can decide if it can be placed into a group of dogs. You should have another person help you while doing this at first. As you become more aware of who these dogs are, you can probably do it your self. This becomes a great skill learning what dogs can coexist with others.
- **Taking dog out of play cage:** When taking dogs out of the play cage you must go all the way into the play cage and put the G/L on the dog that you need and then toss some food for the other dogs to go and get while you calmly leave the play cage. Remember to “body block” (check **Self Control Training Exercises** for more info.) the dog you are taking out of the play cage so it doesn't charge out of the kennel.
- **Walking back to the kennel:** Now you want to get this dog back into the shelter kennel without causing a ruckous for the other dogs. Walk in calmly and have the dog between you and the wall furthest from the kennels and other dogs. Reinforce any dog that is being quiet either by voice or tossing a tidbit of food.

**Putting groups together. Be Observant!**

Don't put adult dogs 3 years and up together unless you know for sure that they will be ok. There should be a current list of what dogs can play together at any time. This might change daily so look at the board (behind the food prep room door).

Try walking dogs together first and if things work well you can try them in a play cage. (Start with dogs of opposite sex first.) Be sure to add the new dog to your appropriate play group. Try different combinations during the first few weeks.

- Don't put unsprayed or unneutered dogs together
- No females in heat or just out of heat cycle.
- Don't place any female in with other dogs right after her heat cycle or who has been recently spayed.
- Don't put large dogs regardless of age in with small dogs unless you stay in cage to supervise play. Large dog/small dog play can too easily turn into an innocent killing of the smaller dog as part of playing too rough. So don't do it!
- Adolescent dogs (8 months & older) must be in the play cage alone for a few days before being introduced to the group play cage
- Any newly spayed dogs (under the age of 1 year) must not be put in the play cage for at least 10 days after surgery
- Any newly spayed females over 1 year old should not go into the single dog play cage for 10 days and then should not be introduced to the group play cage for 5 more days (making a total of 15 days before group play cage introduction). If this female weighs 75 lbs or more, she needs to be kept from play cage introduction for 20 days to be sure the internal sutures heal.
- Adolescent dogs can be put together if properly supervised and left out for no longer than 1 hour together. They should be checked frequently to make sure they are still doing ok. Make sure there are toys to play with - enough for every dog out in the play cage. Check water too.
- Try never to put two dog aggressive dogs in adjacent play cages. Use the third pen and the dog aggressive must be out alone. Or leash walked.

***Use pen 1 & 2 for the social dogs. This way we won't make the anti social dogs any worse.***

- Bullies. Take bullies out of playgroups or go in and supervise while they are playing so you can stop them from tormenting the other puppies/dogs. It's a fine line between playing and controlling/challenging other puppies actions. We must supervise and stop the bullies so we don't make them worse and they don't hurt the other puppies/dogs.

***Please make sure that you let the kennel coordinator and or behavior manager know of any concerns.***

- Add your observations about behavior –good or bad – to a dog's file as it helps us all figure out who this animal is.

The dogs will sometimes change as they become more confident within the shelter so don't stop trying to find a play friend for them just because they couldn't play the first week. Make a note so that volunteers can try and play ball with the doggie unsociable dog and let the volunteers try to take it for a walk with a friendly dog who isn't too bouncy