



## TRAINING PRINCIPLES

Training is simple. When the basic principles of learning are applied, boundaries in teaching can be limitless and lives can be saved. DPFL is committed to programming that helps animals and people learn. Below you will find useful highlights of our approach and an outline of some of our basic techniques.

### DPFL VISION STATEMENT

We will provide the animals in our care all available resources to enhance their quality of life while sheltered and to save as many lives as possible. We will recognize, respect, and treat each animal as an individual. We will utilize [all tools and techniques in our training](#) and behavior programs to teach and support healthy and appropriate behavior for companion animals within our communities. We will continue to learn and develop our skill sets as handlers and trainers so that we may meet the needs of as many sheltered animals as possible. We will support our adopters in strengthening and nourishing their fundamental bond with their companion animals. [We will share our program successes with other animal welfare organizations to support life-saving efforts beyond our own shelter and community.](#)

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- 1) Dogs are responsible for their actions and behaviors; handlers are responsible for providing feedback.** Rewards (or reinforcement, in scientific terms) are defined as useful for increasing behaviors while corrections (or punishment, in scientific terms) are defined as useful for decreasing behaviors.

| Examples of <u>rewards</u> *  | Examples of <u>corrections</u> *   |
|---|--|
| Treats<br>Verbal Praise<br>Petting/Tactile<br>Toys/Play<br>Release of Pressure<br>Rehearsal of Behavior | Introduction of an aversive, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Squirt Bottle</li><li>• Shake can</li></ul> Application of pressure<br>Leash Pop<br>Verbal Displeasure<br>Time-out |
| <b>*Anything the <u>dog</u> finds pleasant</b>  | <b>*Anything the <u>dog</u> finds aversive</b>   |

***\* The dog (or any living being you wish to influence) dictates what they consider rewarding or corrective; our personal opinions are irrelevant. For example, one dog might find being squirted with water to be aversive while another might consider it a fun game. Or, one dog might find petting to be pleasurable while another might be terrified by touch.***



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## 2) Embracing the use of Pressure/Release (P/R):

Most of us consider natural horsemanship to be elegant and inspiring, and the techniques applied are typically accepted by animal lovers internationally. [Considering that the use of P/R is the primary form of communication in our work with horses](#), it is curious that we have become dismissive of this as meaningful communication in the training of our canine companions:

- A soft leash = correct
- Pressure on the leash = adjustment necessary
- Release of pressure = reward

[DPFL techniques utilize the leash as a communication tool \(and an initial safety restraint\) more than a compulsion tool to make dogs comply.](#) From our techniques, everything we teach on leash can be successfully transitioned to off-leash performance more smoothly and reliably. P/R with the leash (or with gentle hands or [body pressure](#)) is the most consistent and key communication we have with our dogs, especially when treats or other rewards are not useful or meaningful [due to fear](#) and/or arousal.

## 3) Progression in training and/or creating a “work ethic” = no more gold stars for ABC’s

Often times our furry students are denied opportunities for mental stimulation by being rewarded too much for too little. There is value in healthy challenge. Once your dog has learned to sit, there is no more need to reward every sit. Science tells us that behaviors are strengthened when rewards are not always predictable. Once you have successfully taught a behavior so that your dog understands their responsibility to a command and can perform happily and well, there is no need to reward each action; the actions or behaviors themselves become the reward. [For example, proceeding out of the kennel and on a walk is a powerful reward for a dog that has learned to exit their kennel and walk through the shelter politely.](#) Now you can save the cookies for teaching some cute tricks or for offering eye contact in the presence of a distraction or other challenge, such as an approaching stranger.

## TECHNIQUES

### Considering REINFORCEMENT vs. REMINDING vs. RE-COMMANDING

☺ **Reinforcement** = information from the handler via reward or correction (in response to the dog’s action) to strengthen desired behaviors or to weaken undesired behaviors.

☺ **Reminding** = verbal support to begin to teach the dog to continue a behavior (such as holding a sit) even though things in the environment might change or be distracting (such as a kennel door opening). Reminding helps to build the dog’s confidence in a behavior and comprehension of a command even from a [distance](#), for a longer [duration](#) and/or in the face of [distraction\(s\)](#).



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⊗ **Re-commanding** = potential misuse of verbal support which might result in teaching an unintended series of behaviors and/or the dog needing multiple cues to perform one behavior. For example: handler gives a command such as “sit”, rewards the behavior by presenting a treat, the dog then breaks position at which point the handler might give the command again (re-command) then reward the behavior again which leads to having to tell them over and over to do the same thing. **Re-commanding should be used sparingly and only when in the initial teaching phases of a behavior.**

## Teaching EYE CONTACT (EC) as a Default Behavior:

### Objectives:

- ✓ Dogs check in with their handlers any time they see something in the environment that is stimulating or concerning.

### Why:

EC is the most rewardable behavior—it trumps everything else! If your dog is looking at you, your dog is thinking about you and you are relevant. They're probably not doing much wrong if they are gazing at you. We ideally want our dogs to look at us if they see anything interesting, exciting, concerning, or scary rather than lunging, barking, aggressing, or trying to bolt.

### EC Protocols:

1. Capture EC and M/R to your heart's content!

### ⊗ Common Handler Mistakes:

- Teaching a command for EC (such as “watch me”) as this creates a dependency on being asked. *Remember: the goal is for EC to become a default behavior.*

## Teaching DOOR ROUTINES (DR):

### Objectives:

- ✓ [Dogs learn that an open door is not a cue to exit](#)
- ✓ To promote safety by minimizing door darting
- ✓ To teach stimulus control by having your dog wait patiently and asking permission to exit no matter what wonderful things await them on the other side of the door

**Why:** [Teaching dogs to respect a person's space and not to dart out the door is a critical safety behavior for both the shelter environment and in the home.](#) Many of us have been knocked down by exuberant dogs desperate to get out of their enclosure resulting in the dangerous situation of a loose dog in the kennel. Many families have suffered the heartbreaking loss of their pet escaping gleefully only to be hurt, lost, or to behave menacingly to others. Most communities provide approved areas for our canine companions to run freely off leash. When our dogs are running loose accidentally, bad things can happen.



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### DR Preparation:

- Use your voice to convey your friendly intent prior to entering their kennel, especially if they are showing signs of concern (avoiding, alerting, or warning).
- The goal is to teach this behavior for times when the dog will not be leashed, so remember to use the door as your primary teaching tool rather than restraining your dog with the leash.
- Wait for any approximation of wanted behaviors to enter the kennel (such as being quiet and/or “four on the floor” (4F), to avoid rewarding unwanted behaviors (such as barking and/or jumping).
- Once you begin to enter the kennel, if the dog reverts to unwanted behaviors you can withdraw yourself momentarily until they offer more appropriate behavior. Timing is critical; the dog should get the sense that jumping up sends you away while standing quietly draws you into the kennel.

***\*It is important to note that this is only effective if the dog wants you to enter or considers your presence to be positive. If you are frightening to the dog and they are jumping up to threaten you to stay away, then withdrawing yourself will reward the dog’s unwanted behavior. Remember...the dog decides what is reinforcing!***

### DR Protocols:

1. Upon approaching any exit (including their kennel door), wait for your dog to have “four on the floor to open the door” – Carly Shivers.
2. Without asking for anything else (such as sit or wait) simply open the door slightly. The dog will most likely try to exit, at which point you will close the door. Good timing allows you to be most gentle. Continue to open and close the door until the dog pauses (anticipating it closing again) and then release them (“free”) to exit.
3. Here is where EC as a default behavior can be most useful. If they are too distracted or worried to offer any EC for you to M/R, you may prompt a time or two with a kissing noise. Often, if you are patient and consistent in using the door to correct exiting without permission, they will end up checking in with you. Avoid bending over to try to get the dog’s attention; it’s better to shift slightly away from them to attract their gaze instead of towards them which will tend to cause them to avoid your gaze.
4. Once your dog is no longer trying to exit when the door opens (and is instead offering automatic EC), you may ask them to sit and then reinforce them holding the sit by M/R when you open the door, ultimately earning their release with EC.
5. Be prepared to reinforce the sit by gently applying leash pressure if they begin to stand. Ideally, you can catch them with soft pressure before they fully stand. The better your timing, the softer you can be with the leash pressure. Their reward for returning to the sit is the release of the leash pressure.
6. Repeat opening and closing the door and reinforcing their choices appropriately until they have mastered remaining seated and offering EC while the door is held open.



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## Teaching KENNEL ROUTINES (KR):

### Objectives:

- Dogs are calm, mannerly and safe to handle when being leashed up and removed from their kennels.
- [Dogs will offer a sit or go to their “place” to entice a handler into their kennel; they will sit patiently while being leashed up; they will hold the sit while their kennel door is opened and will offer EC and wait for the verbal release “free” before exiting their kennel.](#)
- Dogs will walk calmly through the kennels and perform the Door Routine (DR) to exit the building.

**Why:** Systematically teaching KR to all dogs keeps the shelter dogs and handlers safe. Positive KRs help to reduce stress in the kennels while promoting healthy, desirable behaviors that will make the dogs most appealing to adopters. [Learning how to be mannerly with multiple handlers every time the dogs are removed from their kennels provides valuable mental stimulation and helps to develop stimulus control in the dogs while decreasing unwanted behaviors such as barking, jumping, mouthing, and/or redirection.](#)

### KR Preparation:

- Always consider your **exit path** for each dog depending upon their neighbor as well as their level of reactivity and potential for redirection. Until they are accomplished at their KR, safely exiting the kennel is the priority.
- Be prepared to **keep a safe distance** from your dog until outside of the kennels to prevent displaced or redirected bites.
- Use appropriate training **tools/equipment** to keep handlers and the other dogs safe while exiting the kennels.
- If necessary and if possible, close other dogs on the opposite side before handling your reactive dog to minimize stimulation.
- Be prepared to **throw treats** as a reward for approximations of desired behaviors and to minimize rough, hard mouthing and potential redirection due to high arousal, anxiety, or fear.

### KR Protocols:

#### In their kennel:

1. Wait for any approximation of desired behaviors to begin M/R and entering the kennel, such as being quiet and/or “four on the floor” (4F).
2. Once you begin to enter the kennel, if the dog reverts to unwanted behaviors (such as jumping and/or barking) you can withdraw yourself momentarily until they offer a version of something rewardable again. Timing is critical; the dog should get the sense that jumping up pushes you away while standing quietly draws you in.



3. Once inside the kennel with your dog, use your voice in a reassuring and friendly tone to communicate that you are there to provide positive things and to get them out! Take this moment to gauge their anxiety/frustration level and your subsequent safety. Be conscientious about your body language and the dog's reaction to you and your movements. Are they becoming more or less concerned as you try to proceed? Be prepared to exit the kennel to keep yourself safe or remove the dog neutrally but quickly with a slip lead to proceed with training once outside.
4. If the dog is comfortable and you are prepared to proceed, pair treats with the training equipment and/or when attaching the leash to create a positive association with being "leashed up".
5. Work their DR.
6. Over time and practice, build and progress to having them hold a sit and/or go to place through the entire routine.

***\* Once trained, no treats will be necessary for your dog to perform the KR and DR routine flawlessly; being able to proceed on their visit with you outside becomes the reward!***

#### **Outside their kennel:**

7. Allow them some length to their leash to see if they choose to lunge at the other kennels or if they chose to move towards the wall and exit the kennel as quickly as possible, avoiding conflict.
  - a. If they lunge: proceed past them as quickly as possible, closest to the wall so that you are NOT in between them and the kennel they are aggressing towards and ***exit the building as quickly as possible to begin training outside.***
  - b. If they avoid: M/R and toss treats ahead of them closest to the wall, or M/R for EC.
  - c. ***Whenever possible, avoid restraining your dog on a short, tight leash to prevent defensive or redirected aggression.***
  - d. Proceed with DR.

### **Introducing DPFL's FANCY FOOTWORK**

Teaching dogs to be mannerly on leash by using our feet (more than our hands) is a novel concept to most dog handlers. DPFL techniques revolve around the principles of learning and the understanding of *oppositional reflex* where the natural response of most living things to pressure of any kind is to physically resist = pulling! We've all heard the saying "it takes two to pull". Therefore, using our leash to try to physically keep a dog by our side (by either restraining them with a short and tight leash or with active leash corrections) is easily misunderstood by most dogs; instead of staying close, most instinctively will want to move away or avoid us.



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When we focus on using our footwork and body positioning with our dogs (while keeping our hands still and quiet), we create a “soft spot” by our side which is comfortable and pleasing to even those dogs that are fearful or easily aroused/distracted by the surrounding environment. Imagine being tethered to a tree. The tree is immovable. If we move closer to the tree there will be no tension on our tether. If we persist in moving away from the tree there will be no relief from the tension; relief only comes from closer proximity. This is what we want our dogs to experience when tethered to us by a leash; soft closeness.

Besides, what would possibly motivate a dog to be taken out of their kennel only to walk in a restricted fashion next to a perfect stranger?! How frustrating or concerning must that be for an aroused or fearful dog? Understanding the dog’s perspective and being sensitive to their experience while being handled is critical in all training, but most especially for our sheltered dogs that are relying upon us for support and guidance. Most dogs can be taught to be comfortable and enjoy being by our side with the use of treats and other rewards. For the many shelter dogs that are not yet interested in treats, and when resistance is more natural while exploration is more appealing, the use of pressure and release can be an effective way to teach leash manners. So how do we effectively teach our shelter dogs to walk nicely on leash not only for us but for unknown handlers (such as volunteers and/or potential adopters)? FANCY FOOTWORK!

## Teaching Loose Leash Walking (LLW):

### Objectives:

- ✓ [To teach shelter dogs how to walk on a loose leash while allowing them to sniff and explore and move more freely without pulling or dragging their handler.](#)

### Why:

Attracting volunteers to help enrich our shelter dogs with walks is critical. Teaching our dogs to walk politely while exploring affords both dog and handler the opportunity to enjoy their time together.

### LLW Protocols:

1. Handlers only hold the handle of the leash (“Held like a handle not worn like a bracelet” – Dick Russell)
2. Only proceed and walk forward when the leash is soft
3. If the dog pulls, the handler will move in the opposite direction their dog is pulling (still facing their dog rather than an about-turn) until the dog moves closer which will soften the leash, at which point the handler can proceed forward again. Consider this an exaggerated game of “red light-green light” adding handler movement rather than simply standing still.

***\* Avoid using hands to try to steer, reposition, or move the dog. Allow your dog to learn how to feel the difference between the tension from pulling and the softness of orienting closer to their handler.***



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## Teaching Working Walk (WW):

### Objectives:

- ✓ [Teaching the dog to walk next to the handler on the left side in proper position as if “heeling”.](#)

### Why:

Teaching basic obedience and leash skills can be mentally stimulating and fun for our shelter dogs rather than being punitive or unpleasant. The demonstration of these behaviors is appealing to many adopters. Additionally, building civil skill sets helps us to place safe companion animals into our communities.

### WW Protocols:

1. Hold the handle of your leash in your right hand (*“held like a handle rather than worn like a bracelet”* - Dick Russell)
2. Find the working length of the leash with the left hand (this length is different for every dog and handler). It is the length of leash that allows your dog to walk comfortably NEXT to you without pressure on the leash. Avoid giving the dog enough length to sniff the ground, get in front of you, or wander behind you. The key is for the leash not to sag too much but to allow the clip of the leash to drop, signifying a lack of maintained tension.

**\* It is important that we do not physically force our dogs or restrain them by our side. The goal is to teach them to WANT to be by our side!**

3. Lay your hand on top of the leash, tuck your thumb and pinky underneath, then gently close your hand to maintain a consistent grip on the leash in that exact location. Avoid an underhanded grip; imagine how your hands fall naturally by your side and allow your leash to lay in your hand as such.
4. RELAX your shoulders and walk naturally as if there is nothing in your hands. Our goal is for you and your dog to walk effortlessly and naturally together with no tension.

### Three mistakes dogs make in a WW:

1. **Pulling** – maintaining steady pressure on the leash in any direction
2. **Forging** – cutting in front of the handler
3. **Ducking** – cutting behind the handler

### Three solutions (corrections) for the handlers to apply in a WW:

1. **Drop ‘n Go** (for pulling) = drop the leash from the left hand (while keeping a hold of the handle with the right hand) then move your feet in the opposite direction of the dog while still facing them (not an about-turn). Drop with your hand and GO! with your feet.





2. **Left hand circles or “closing the door”** – Sarah Wilson (for forging) = circling to the left to yield your dog to turn or stepping in a C motion in front of your dog to briefly block them from passing in front of you.
3. **Back-Up-Big-Step (BUBS)** (for ducking behind) = keeping your hands in the same position without changing them at all, back up into the leash then take a BIG STEP back with you right leg (the leg closest to your dog), inviting the dog with your body language and voice to the proper position by your left side.

By design, the three handler actions in response to the three mistakes the dogs make when on leash result in everywhere (except by your side) being a nuisance for the dog. Adding treats and/or praise and/or petting (when the dog is interested) strengthens their desire to find that soft spot and to remain. Your dog will still be able to learn to find that soft spot from the above techniques if treats aren't yet of value. Often, after being consistent with your responses, the dog will become clear and comfortable next to you and will begin to take treats, even if they were previously reluctant. Being mannerly on leash is a critical skill for our shelter dogs to be safe and enjoyable when on walks.

### Teaching the AUTO-SIT:

#### Objectives:

- ✓ The dog automatically sits and offers EC once we stop walking.

**Why:** When our dogs perform this behavior reliably it demonstrates a connection to and regard for their handler. Adopters find this behavior extremely attractive.

#### Auto-Sit Protocols:

1. Say “sit” 2 steps prior to stopping
2. Give your dog a chance to offer the behavior before providing the appropriate reinforcement (reward for a sit, or luring the sit with treats, or guiding the sit with gentle-touch pressure and/or leash pressure).
3. Mark any sit (even if crooked) and then reward your dog in position (luring a few times to show them that by your side and facing forward is preferable). When the reward is delivered it is important that your dog is lined up by your left side and in proper, obedient position so this picture becomes most comfortable and familiar for them, creating the habit of being by your side.

#### ⊗ Common Handler Mistakes:

- Handler says “sit” **after** they've stopped which encourages the dogs to lead out and face the handler from the front rather than by their side in proper position.
- Handler rewards the dog in front of them which also encourages sloppy position.

## CONCLUSION

Understanding the scientific principles of learning while being sensitive to the dog's experience allows us to teach creatively and most effectively for each individual dog. Providing excellent quality of life for shelter dogs includes efficient training techniques that help them to cope and to thrive and learn as quickly as possible to support their transition into a loving home.

