Title:	**How to Write Concerning Behavior Urgent Notes Memos in Pet Point**
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1. Purpose and Scope

All animals in our care should have any concerning behaviors or history notes listed in an **Urgent Note** memo in PetPoint. This will make it easy for any staff person interacting with that animal to see all information about which they should be aware. Although positive information is important to have and will help the Adoptions department promote the animal, it is not as important as concerning information when we consider staff and volunteer safety, as well as making a good match in an adoptive home and setting adopters' expectations. Having easy access to all concerning information will allow adopters to be fully informed at the time of adoption about what we know and what they might experience themselves.

Often in a shelter, there is a dearth of information about an animal's behavior. This is one of the biggest criticisms we hear from adopters after adoption when they come in for a free private session or when we counsel them after adoption. It's also a criticism of adopting a shelter animal in general and a hazard for staff safety.

A shelter behavior evaluation such as a SAFER is only a snapshot in time and should usually not be considered the entire evaluation of an animal in the shelter **(see ASPCA Position Statement on Shelter Dog Behavior Evaluations)**. To avoid making uninformed decisions, our assessment process must be able to collate information gathered about safety and behavior concerns, which may need to be updated throughout an animal's stay.

At this point in time, it is usually not possible to accurately and consistently categorize how concerning behaviors seen in the shelter will appear in the home. For instance, if one tries to put animals in categories before adoption, such as 'this dog is dog-reactive, highly-aroused, etc.," and counsel for that, there's a good chance the adopter will not experience that particular issue, although they may experience another slightly related issue, which may be more or less intense as compared to what was seen in the shelter. This limitation is due to the fact that environment and individuals interacting with an animal can change the animal's behavior.

So, the most help we can give to the adopter is to tell them what we have seen – not what we think it will become. For instance, if we know a dog has barked repeatedly in certain situations, we want to disclose that information to the adopter. Plus, giving concrete descriptions of an event will help the event stick in the adopter's mind better than a label or fuzzy category, which tells no story. For instance, this dog is "shy" is much less helpful than, "this dog did not approach unknown people when they came into the kennel."

Additionally, if we do want to research what behaviors seen in the shelter tend to develop into other behaviors in the home, we should begin by identifying objective behaviors, rather than interpretive behavior categories, since there may be differences within behavior categories based on specific behaviors that are more telling of successes or failures as a pet after adoption.

2. Instruction

Concerning behavior notes should be completely or almost completely, objective descriptions of all concerning behavior in PetPoint, whether seen in the previous home, foster, shelter, at time of intake, with medical, or in the field, as well as any case notes in PetPoint. The entire record should be read thoroughly whenever creating these

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memos. Descriptions should state the context of the situation: what happened just before the animal did this, and any relevant context information.

Any descriptions of the following should be included, no matter how minor:

- not allowing someone to complete a behavior test or do something with the dog, even if just due to excitement

- "bad manners", such as jumping up on people or objects, counter-surfing, marking indoors (peeing inside the shelter kennel is the only thing we don't need to include; however, office fosters that mark indoors or pee frequently inside the kennel should be noted)

- discomfort, fear, reactivity, high-arousal, or aggression with or without a barrier involved, and in all noted circumstances (leashes are considered barriers)

- hissing

- swatting

- repeated barking or vocalizing

- scratching with nails (that leaves marks)

- body tension (stiffness) or stiff, waxy movements, such as during dog intro or on food bowl test
    - even if it doesn't continue, it's important to note when it did happen

- hard eye or hard staring or staring that does not stop until something in the environmental changes

- head-whipping (may quickly whip their head and mouth toward a person's body, especially if the person is touching them)

- muzzle-punching (the person may feel the dog's teeth or nose)

- freezing

- lip-curling or showing teeth

- growling

- rushing in, body slamming, charging, running the fence, pinning, or cornering

- nipping or mouthing (that hurts or doesn't; open mouthed or closed)

- snapping or attempting to bite

- biting, include:
    - where on the body
    - describe the level of damage; if you include the Dunbar Bite Scale level, you must still describe the injury
    - through what clothing, if any
    - to whom it happened
    - what happened just before

- leash grabbing or climbing, tugging repeatedly on the leash

- humping or spinning repeatedly or where it's difficult to get the dog to stop

- hunkering over or moving away with a resource

- descriptions of "submissiveness" or fear

- ears pinned back

- tapping out (rolling on back to expose the belly)

- crouching

- pancaking (quickly laying flat on the ground)

- getting stuck in place (not moving forward)

- asocial behavior (includes, sniffing the ground instead of interacting; not approaching another dog or human, such as on a dog-to-dog introduction or during a shelter behavior assessment

- Put in quotations any subjective or unclear statements that might indicate concerning behavior, such as from the owner history or an animal control officer report.

  - For instance, if the owner history indicates that Fido "jumps up on and barks at strangers". More context would be helpful (is the dog wiggly or stiff? what does the bark sound like?), but if it's all we have, then we should at least include that in quotations, so we know that's what was stated to us. Also, include any statements with labels of the animal that could indicate a level of fear or discomfort, including "submissive" and "dominant".

  - Include all statements about objective behavior that are qualified by a person who knows the animal, which could potentially be concerning, such as, if the dog jumps up and barks at strangers, but the owner qualifies it as, "she's just playing." Include the objective behavior and include the owner's subjective interpretation in quotations.

- if the dog lived in neglected or abusive conditions (such as in transports where the dog was from a meat farm or hoarding case)

2.1. If an animal is placed on the Behavior Review stage in Pet Point, or if there are other observations in the shelter by volunteers or staff that are concerning as the animal's stay progresses, an update with a description of that behavior should be added to or placed as a bullet point in this memo.

  - If you are the person that responds via email to the concerning behavior report, you are the person who should immediately update the animal's memo.

2.2. If you are not sure or don't think an animal will be made available for adoption, still put in this memo, so that all staff has easy access to any information they need to be aware of

  - Add an adoption Follow-Up memo into Pet Point for any behaviors that you would like to follow up on after adoption, especially any anxiety, fear, or aggression issues. Please copy and paste the entire Urgent Note memo into the Post-Adoption Follow-up Memo, for reference.

2.3. It is OK for behavior staff to put a small sentence at the end of a point, to say why we might be concerned about this behavior, if it does not seem obvious. For instance, "this behavior may be an indicator of anxiety or distress when the animal is left alone."

  - However, please keep these statements to a minimum because we may be inaccurate in predicting what that behavior might become in a home or other environment.

  - If you do add a note about what the behavior might become in a home, make sure to avoid trainer jargon. For instance, avoid the terms such as the following, and instead say:

    - Separation anxiety --> anxiety or distress when left alone.

    - Resource guarding --> feeling threatened by people approaching him when he has high-value objects/chews/food/toys, etc.

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- Dog selective --> may not feel comfortable around all dogs

- Leash reactive --> may bark lunge, growl at other dogs when being walked on leash, etc.

2.4. All descriptions of events should be written in the third person, for instance, "A staff person found the dog spinning. She took the dog out of the kennel, and he continued to spin."

2.5. Personal experiences described by staff should be simplified without taking away important context. For instance, take out unnecessary information, such as a statement about how the someone thought a person got bitten, but they actually didn't.

2.6. Memos should not have staff, volunteers', or the public's names in them.

2.7. Memos should also be written in complete sentences, especially if you're recounting a story.

2.8. Each point should have the context, such as, "in the shelter," "in the previous home," etc.

2.9. Do not include any information about how staff should or will be handling the situation or any information about next steps for that animal, or on which the animal's outcome is dependent. For instance, do not say, "Behavior is discussing next steps." That information should be listed in a separate Behavior memo.

2.10. The top of each memo should read, _____ has the following concerning notes in her history:

   o Do NOT skip a line after the top line of the memo.

   o Each new bullet point under the title line should start with a dash.

   o You CAN skip a line underneath each dashed point, if the points are longer than a sentence, to make it easier to read.

2.11. If there are multiple instances of the same concerning behavior, or if we're laying out a progression of concerning behaviors, the instance should start with the date and then a colon: for instance,

   o - 10/7/2018:

2.12. General terms/phrases to avoid or further explain with objective descriptions:

   o "had no issues with"

   ▪ What did the dog do?

   o "very much enjoyed"

   ▪ What did the dog do?

   o "hard mouthed on the evaluation"

   ▪ There's no context here. What specifically happened right before the dog mouthed during the evaluation?

   o "no resource guarding noted"

   ▪ What did the dog do during that test item?

3. Attachments

No attachments.

4. References