**Shelter Behavior Risk Assessment**

This behavior pathway resource guides the user through a series of questions to identify potential hazards and their possible mitigation when considering aggression cases.

Use the Risk Assessment to weigh overall risk for a given case and factor that into your decision to treat a dog with a history of, or the potential for, aggressive behavior. The risk assessment can also be used when deciding if you should place an animal without treatment (e.g., a resource guarder).

## Risk assessments examine three major questions:

1. How bad will the result be if the dog reacts aggressively?
2. How likely is aggression to happen?
3. Are there additional mitigating factors that impact the overall risk?

## In other words:

Overall Impact = (Severity of Consequence + Likelihood of Occurrence) – Mitigating Factors

This behavior pathway resource takes each question in order, first considering **Consequences** and **Likelihood** of the aggressive behavior to determine the overall risk level. Flagged items – identified by a flag () in the “risk” column – should be weighted more heavily when considering overall risk. The risk assessment is followed by a **Mitigating Factors** section, where specific circumstances that influence risk are considered.

Some specific responses result in a “hard stop” – identified by a stop sign () in the risk column. In these cases, the animal will likely be excluded from treatment regardless of the risk assessment for other items or mitigating circumstances.

Unfortunately, not all questions will have answers. “Unknown” is included to account for this reality. The level of uncertainty itself becomes part of the risk assessment. More uncertainty may point to increased risk potential.

This behavior pathway resource is designed to help teams explore all the types of risk factors to be considered. It is not designed to be the only resource used to make pathway planning or outcome decisions, except in cases with an extreme bite history. Such decisions should be made collaboratively during each team’s integrated pathway planning process. The Risk Assessment is an informative tool to aid decision-makers.

## Things to consider as you complete this Risk Assessment:

Questions about bites do not refer to mouthing. This resource is not designed to differentiate mouthing from aggressive biting. For more information on the difference between mouthing and biting, please see the Glossary of Terms.

Refer to the Shannon Bite Scale (at end of this document) when choosing bite levels. This scale has separate definitions for human-directed and dog-directed bites.

Mitigating factors (e.g., unusually provocative stimuli or length of time since last incident) are considered in a separate section.

**Section 1**

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| **SEVERITY OF CONSEQUENCE: How bad is the outcome?** |
| **What is the animal's size?** | Choose One |
| Toy/Teacup: < 10lbs | **Mild** |
| Small: 10-20lbs | **Mild** |
| Medium: 20-50lbs | **Moderate** |
| Large: 50-90lbs | **Considerable** |
| Giant: > 90lbs | **Severe** |

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| **What is the bite severity? Use scale at end of document.**  | Choose One | Flag with solid fill |
| Level 0  | **Mild** |
| Level I-II | **Mild- Moderate** |
| Level III | **Moderate** |
| Level IV | **Considerable** | Stop with solid fill |
| Level V-VI | **Severe** | Stop with solid fill |
| Unknown/NA | **Uncertain** |

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| What area is the target of bite(s) or attempted bite(s) to *humans*? If multiple areas are targeted, please select the area with the highest risk. | Choose One |
| Clothing | **Mild** |
| Extremities (hands or ankles) | **Moderate** |
| Limbs | **Considerable** |
| Torso | **Considerable** |
| Face | **Severe** |
| Unknown/NA | **Uncertain** |

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| **Who is the target of *human-directed* bite(s) or attempted bite(s)?**  | Choose One |
| Specific individuals only | **Moderate** |
| All humans  | **Moderate** |
| Elderly or mobility restricted individuals only | **Considerable** |
| Children only | **Severe** | Stop with solid fill |
| Unknown/NA | **Uncertain** |

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| **Who is the target of *dog-directed* bite(s) or attempted bite(s)?**  | Choose One |
| Specific individuals only | **Moderate** |
| Intact males or females only | **Moderate** |
| All dogs  | **Considerable** |
| Vulnerable dogs only, (e.g., geriatric, injured, or puppies) | **Severe** |
| Unknown/NA | **Uncertain** |

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| **When not physically restricted, what is the response to trigger(s)?** | Choose One |
| Distance increasing | **Mild** |
| Maintain distance | **Moderate** |
| Approach-avoidance conflicted response | **Considerable** |
| Distance decreasing | **Severe** |
| Unknown | **Uncertain** |

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| **What is the duration of warning behaviors?** | Choose One |
| Long duration, possible to avoid or intervene, 30+ seconds | **Mild** |
| Medium duration with some ability to avoid or intervene, 10-30 seconds | **Moderate** |
| Short duration with little-no ability to avoid or intervene, 3-10 seconds | **Considerable** |
| No warning was seen (may have been given but was missed)  | **Severe** |
| Unknown | **Uncertain** |

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| **What is the persistence of aggressive behavior?** | Choose One |
| Dog switches focus easily (e.g., with a verbal prompt or reinforcer) and stays disengaged from trigger | **Mild** |
| Dog can be distracted/interrupted with effort (e.g., using repeated verbal or physical prompts or high-value rewards), with the trigger still present | **Moderate** |
| Dog persists with aggressive behavior until either the dog or the trigger is removed from area | **Considerable** |
| Dog persists with aggressive behavior even after the dog or the trigger is removed from the area | **Severe** |
| Unknown | **Uncertain** |

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| **Does the dog redirect when aroused/aggressive?** | Choose One |
| No | **Mild** |
| Yes | **Considerable** |
| Unknown | **Uncertain** |

*Flagged items should be weighted more heavily when considering overall risk.*

 *‘Stop’ indicates this animal may be excluded from treatment based on the single item response.*

Based on your answers to all the **Consequence** questions, think about the whole picture and circle the potential severity of another aggressive episode in the future.

***Note: This is not an average or sum of the above selections.***

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Mild** | **Moderate** | **Considerable** | **Severe** | **Uncertain** |

**Section 2**

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|  **LIKELIHOOD OF OCCURRENCE: How likely is it to happen?** |
| **How many trigger(s) elicit the aggression?** | Choose One |
| 1 | **Rare - Unlikely** |
| 2 or 3 | **Possible** |
| 4 or 5 | **Likely** |
| 6 or more | **Almost Certain** |
| Unknown | **Uncertain** |

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| **How consistently does aggression occur in response to the trigger(s)?** | Choose One | Flag with solid fill |
| Very consistently | **Rare - Unlikely** |
| Somewhat consistently | **Possible** |
| Inconsistently | **Likely** |
| Seemingly random | **Almost Certain** |
| Unknown | **Uncertain** |

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| **Can you *reasonably* avoid the trigger or prevent the response in this facility?** | Choose One |
| Yes | **Unlikely** |
| No | **Likely** |
| Unknown | **Uncertain** |

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| **Without management, how frequently would the dog encounter this trigger in the average home?** | Choose One | Flag with solid fill |
| Very infrequently | **Unlikely** |
| Somewhat infrequently | **Possible** |
| Somewhat frequently | **Likely** |
| Very frequently | **Almost Certain** |
| Unknown | **Uncertain** |

 *Flagged items should be weighted more heavily when considering overall risk.*

Based on your answers to all the **Likelihood** questions, think about the whole picture and circle the *likelihood* of a future aggressive episode.

***Note: This is not an average or sum of the above selections****.*

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Unlikely** | **Possible** | **Likely** | **Almost Certain** | **Uncertain** |

**Overall Risk Assessment Matrix**

Find your overall consequence selection in the matrix below (rows), then move down the matrix to your overall likelihood selection (columns).

The combined consequence and likelihood square suggests an overall risk for that case. For example, a case with a “Considerable” consequence that is “Unlikely” corresponds to an overall risk of Medium.

Next, go to the “Mitigating Factors” section to consider if the potential risk is affected by other factors, if appropriate.

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| --- | --- |
| **Overall Risk Key** | **Consequence** |
| **Mild** | **Moderate** | **Considerable** | **Severe** | **Uncertain** |
| **Likelihood** | **Rare** | **Low** | **Low** | **Medium** | **High** | **Uncertain** |
| **Unlikely** | **Low** | **Medium** | **Medium** | **High** | **Uncertain** |
| **Possible** | **Medium** | **Medium** | **High** | **High** | **Uncertain** |
| **Likely** | **Medium** | **High** | **High** | **Extreme** | **Uncertain** |
| **Almost Certain** | **Medium** | **High** | **Extreme** | **Extreme** | **Uncertain** |
| **Uncertain** | **Uncertain** | **Uncertain** | **Uncertain** | **Uncertain** | **Uncertain** |

**Mitigating Factors**

# Are there special circumstances to consider?

Mitigating factors may attenuate or override your overall risk assessment.

However, most often these factors will not rise to the level that you should disregard medium-, high- and extreme-risk selections above. This section should be used sparingly.

## Select all that apply:

* Time since incident occurred (with many opportunities to display aggression or with regular exposure to same context)
* Severely inappropriate handling (i.e., handler causes the dog pain or behaves in another highly inappropriate, unusual manner)
* Extremely startling/provoking event (e.g., someone steps on the dog’s body while it sleeps and causes injury, a child shoves a pencil into the dog’s ear)
* Limited to medical procedures only (if severity low and/or aggression is easily prevented with management techniques)
* Other unique or important factors related to this case (list): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Based on the mitigating factors considered here, is the risk reduced?**

If you think the risk is reduced, circle your revised risk assessment:

## Revised Risk

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Low** | **Medium** | **High** | **Extreme** | **Uncertain** |

*Please use the overall risk assessment in your team’s decision-making process for this case.*

**Cara Shannon Bite Scale**

The scale has separate definitions for human-directed and dog-directed bites.

# Dog to *Human* Bite Hierarchy

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| --- | --- |
| **Level Zero** | There is either air snapping without contact with the skin or a muzzle punch. Harassment, such as growling or snarling without either an air snap or a muzzle punch does not reach the hierarchy and would simply be categorized as an aggressive incident, but not as a bite. |
| **Level One** | A bite and release or resting of the teeth on the body with contact to the skin or clothing. There may be slight scratches of the skin or tearing of the clothing. Bruising will be light to medium gray. Wounds will be superficial, and estimates would indicate that less than 15% of the dog’s canine tooth entered the person’s skin. |
| **Level Two** | A bite and release that results in scratches, punctures, or nicks with light to medium gray bruising. This is similar to Level One, but estimates would indicate that between 15-30% of the dog’s canine teeth entered the body. Bruising will still be fairly light to medium gray. There will not be deep punctures or gaping lacerations – the wounds are still fairly superficial. |
| **Level Three** | A bite with pressure but no hold. There is no report of shaking or pathology to indicate shaking or crushing. There are puncture wounds from the canine teeth and estimates would indicate that between 30-50% of the dog’s canine teeth entered the victim’s body. There may be wounds from the incisors but there should not be wounds from the premolars. Bruising will be darker gray or purple and black. |
| **Level Four** | A bite that results in a deep, gaping laceration – or – a complete avulsion of the skin – or – a report of, or evidence of shaking. Estimates would indicate that more than 50% of the length of the canine teeth entered the body for lacerations or that the portion of the skin removed in the case of avulsion is greater than 50% of the dog’s jaw measurement from top to bottom when open. |
| **Level Five** | A gripping or crushing bite that is held. Estimates would indicate that at least 50% of the dog’s canine teeth entered the body. Bruising will be deep purple or black and may begin to appear immediately. There may be evidence or a report of shaking. There will likely be wounds from the canine teeth, incisors, and premolars. There may be injuries to the bones, tendons, or ligaments or either complete or partial loss of the function of the limbs. |
| **Level Six** | There are life threatening or serious injuries, including injuries to internal organs of the abdominal or thoracic cavities, potential or actual loss of limb, or crushing injuries to the head or neck. |
| **Level Seven** | The victim dies – bites may be single but would more typically be multiple. |

# Dog to *Dog* Bite Hierarchy

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| --- | --- |
| **Level Zero** | There is air snapping but no contact to the fur or skin (fur should be dry - if the fur is wet, contact was made, and the bite is not a Level Zero). |
| **Level One** | A bite and release with contact to the fur, superficial scratches or removal of fur, where estimates would indicate that no more than 5% of the dog’s canine teeth entered the other dog’s body -- or -- a bite where a dog grips another dog’s body and does not release but does not inflict external or internal damage. |
| **Level Two** | A bite and release where estimates would indicate that 5 to 15% of the dog’s canine teeth entered the other dog’s body. |
| **Level Three** | There are lacerations or punctures where estimates would indicate 15 to 30% of the dog’s canine teeth entered the other dog’s body. There may be tearing of the skin from the underlying musculature or subcutaneous pockets. |
| **Level Four** | There are deep lacerations where estimates would indicate that 30 to 50% of the dog’s canine teeth entered other dog’s body – or – there are no external wounds of any significance but exploratory surgery reveals lacerations, tearing, or puncture wounds to the underlying musculature of the dog – or – there was a report or evidence of shaking of the head. There are no crushing injuries or serious internal injuries. |
| **Level Five** | A bite with holding pressure and possibly shaking of the head – external injuries may or may not be present, but serious internal injuries are present. Internal injuries may be found through exploratory surgery or indicated by shock or vomiting, skin bulging up when breathing, or displacement of the ribs. |
| **Level Six** | The victim dies - bites may be single or multiple but will most often be multiple. |

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