

# Animal Behavior and Restraint:

## Companion Animals



During a disaster response, tasks such as rescuing displaced or injured animals or administering first aid or other medical treatment will require the handling of companion animals. Understanding proper handling and restraint methods will minimize stress on the animals and reduce the risk of injury to responders.

### Companion Animals

- Domesticated species
  - Dogs, cats, rabbits, rodents, birds
  - Exotic animals: reptiles, amphibians, monkeys, non-traditional rodents (hedgehogs)
- Service animals have special considerations
  - Must remain with owner at human shelter
- Local animal facilities: animal shelters, kennels, pet stores, animal research facilities, farms, zoos
- Illegal animals: hoarding, animal fighting operations, illegal exotic animals or wildlife

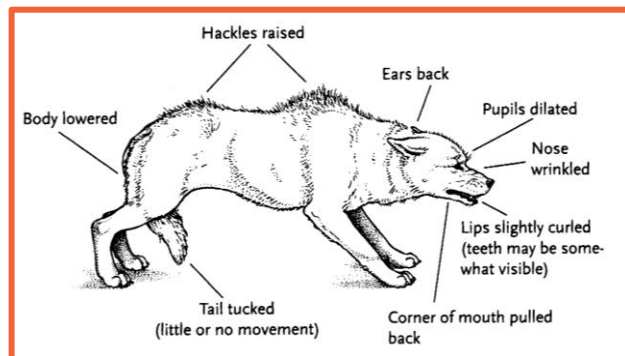
### General Behavior

- Most domesticated animals usually exhibit compliant behavior, trust in people and have a calm, non-aggressive demeanor
- During disaster or animal health emergency situations, fear, stress or injury may alter animal's behavior making them more likely to bite; animals may also be protective of their territory
- When approaching an unknown animal
  - Safety first
  - Watch animal's body language for cues to demeanor of animals
  - Approach from the side or crouching position
  - Avoid cornering the animal
  - Avoid direct eye contact
  - Expect the unexpected
  - Keep an escape route available at all times

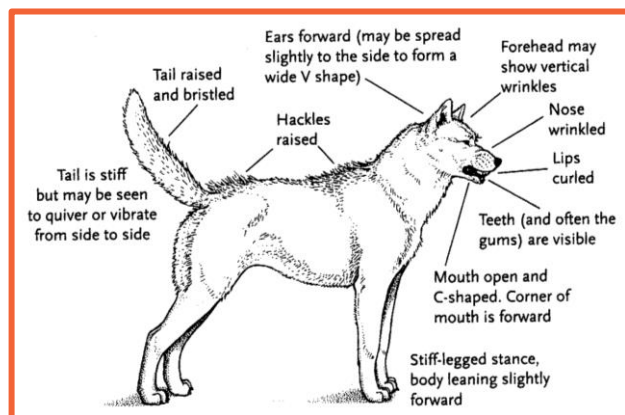
### Dogs

- While many dogs will be approachable, others may be frightened or aggressive. Dogs showing either of these behaviors should be approached with caution as they may bite.

#### ➤ Fearful – Defensive Threat



#### ➤ Aggressive – Offensive Threat



Diagrams are from the Federal Emergency Management Agency Community Emergency Response Teams Animal Training

#### ➤ Approaching an unknown dog

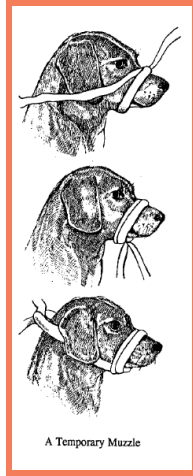
- Call the animal with a soft voice
- Attempt basic obedience commands
- Offer a treat or food
- Approach the animal slowly
- Minimize arm and hand movements
- Place slip leash without physical contact
- Avoid grabbing collar or standing over dog
- Avoid loud noises, flashing lights
- Minimize people in area

#### ➤ If dog is aggressive

- Experienced dog handler should approach
- Two or more people

## ➤ Dog Restraint Devices

- Slip leashes
  - Only if non-aggressive
  - Do not attach leash to the collar
  - Do not drag dog on leash
  - Do not leave dog in slip leash unattended or tied to any object
- Muzzles
  - Cloth, leather, gauze, rope, twine
  - Do not restrict open-mouth breathing - especially in hot weather
  - Do not leave muzzled dog unattended
  - Should not be on for long periods of time
- Snare or catch pole
- Towels



[Illustration from FAZD Center: Veterinary Science: Preparatory Training for the Veterinary Assistant – Handling and Restraining Dogs and Cats.]

## ➤ Lifting and Carrying Dogs

- Support chest and hindquarters
- If bite potential, muzzle prior to lifting
- Small dogs: Lift under abdomen, hand between front legs
- Medium dogs: Cradle arms around chest and haunches
- Large dogs: Two people to lift and carry



## ➤ Standing restraint for dogs

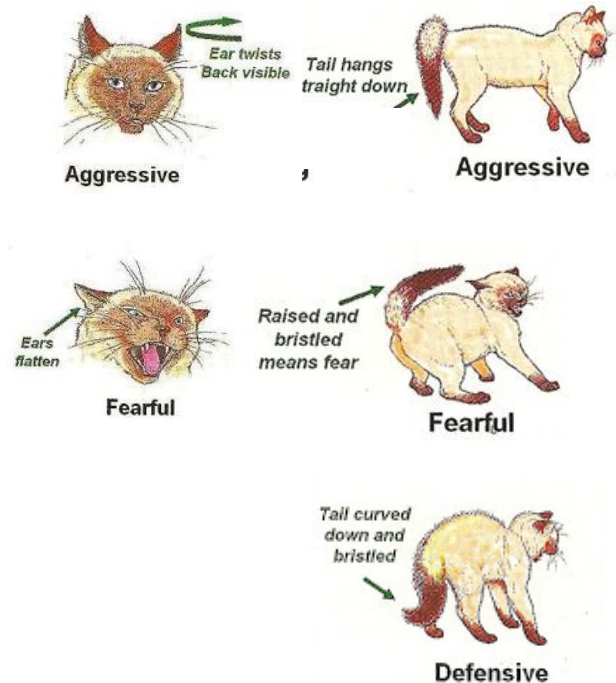
- Place one arm under the dog's neck
- Other arm behind the rear legs or under dog's abdomen
- Pull dog's head snug against shoulder

## ➤ Lateral restraint for dogs

- Gently lay dog on its side
- Stand against dog's back
- Place arms across the dog's neck and hindquarter
- Grasp bottom legs (legs closest to surface)

## Cats

### ➤ Body Language



### ➤ Handling Cats

- Approach in crouch or sideways
- Move slowly
- Speak slowly and softly
- Offer food
- Aggressive or fearful cats
  - Allow cat time to calm down
  - Use gloves
  - Attempt capture with nets, blankets, traps

### ➤ Carrying/Transporting Cats

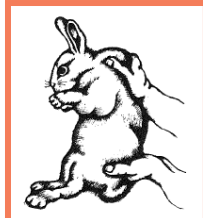
- One hand restrains the forelegs
- Arm crosses flank to hold body
- Other hand gently holds the head
- Scruff by skin at neck
- Minimize noises and bright lights
- Gloves or blanket can protect from bites and scratches
- Transport in appropriate carrier
  - Lower cat into the carrier hind feet first
  - Pillowcases can be used as carriers



## Handling Other Species

### ➤ Rabbits

- Normally docile
- Grasp the scruff of the neck; lift quickly
- **Always support the hindquarters**
- Never grab by ears or tail
- Carry with feet pointing away from your body



- If nervous/scared, cover with a light towel or blanket

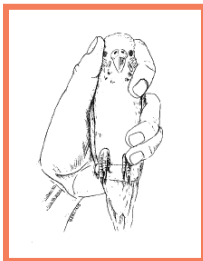
### ➤ Rodents and Ferrets

- Make sure the animal is awake to avoid bites
- Hold in one hand, cup other over its head
- Wrap thumb and index finger around neck and under chin
- Do not over tighten fingers around chest as this can impair breathing



### ➤ Birds

- Trained personnel
- Can stress easily
- Do not squeeze thorax
- Sensitive to overheating
- Small to medium sized
  - Grasp from behind, finger and thumb on sides of head, others around body
- Large birds require 2 hands
- Towel can also be used



### ➤ Reptiles and Amphibians

- Temperature-sensitive
  - Different species - different temperatures
  - Avoid getting too cold or too hot
- Skilled professionals for handling

Handling illustrations from *Restraint of Domestic Animals* (1991) by TF Sonsthagen.]

## Additional Resources

- Federal Emergency Management Agency, Community Emergency Response Team. Animal Response Modules I and II.  
<http://www.fema.gov/community-emergency-response-teams/training-materials>
- AVMA Emergency Preparedness and Response Guide available at:  
<https://www.avma.org/kb/resources/reference/disaster/pages/default.aspx>
- Fowler M. *Restraint and Handling of Wild and Domestic Animals*, 3rd Edition. 2008. Ames: Wiley –Blackwell.
- Sonsthagen TF. *Restraint of Domestic Animals*. 1991. St. Louis: Mosby.

Development of this educational material was by the Center for Food Security and Public Health at Iowa State University through funding from the Multi-State Partnership for Security in Agriculture MOU-2013-HSEMD-002. June 2013. Revised July 2014.

