**Canine Fear Scale**

This scale assesses behavior observed in the moment; it does *not* assess stable traits,

nor should it be used to make statements about a dog’s personality.

# Neutral

Body: Body is loose or relaxed. Tail may wag at a low or neutral position; ears and mouth are relaxed. Pupils are normally dilated with a soft gaze. Dog easily makes eye contact with social partners.

Behavior:Dog appears relaxed and does not try to escape, pace, or hide. Dog readily approaches the average person when sufficiently motivated. Dog consents to gentle petting. Dog does not require defensive handling.

# Mild Fear (FAS 1-2)

*Note: FAS refers to the Fear Free Shelters® Spectrum of Fear, Anxiety, or Stress handout. FAS does not perfectly correlate with ASPCA’s Fear Scale but has been loosely categorized within this scale for teams who routinely refer to FAS.*

Body:Body is somewhat or intermittently tense. Tail is low and may or may not wag; ears may be back. Posture may be lowered. May sit or lie down with tensed muscles. Dog may assume submissive posture (ears back, low fast tail wag, may lick lips, lift paw or paw person, or submissively urinate).

Behavior:Dog displays mild hesitation, cautious, slow movement, mildly agitated movement, or brief immobility/inactivity. Dog seems vigilant and may focus attention on exiting/getting away. May briefly explore (sniffing + movement) or look around while air scenting. May startle but recovers quickly. May stress yawn, lip lick, fidget, pace, or scratch self.

When in the presence of a person or stimulus, the dog is aware and may show some interest (look at, sniff, mouth, or lick the person or stimulus). May be unwilling to approach but may watch or air-scent toward the person or stimulus or may vacillate between approach and avoidance. May freeze briefly or try to move or pull away in response to leashing or handling. May startle or flinch in response to touch but recovers quickly.

# Moderate Fear (FAS 3-4)

Body:Dog’s body is tense/rigid. Tail is low or tucked, ears are back, and eyes are wide. May crouch, sit in a hunched position, lie down with tense muscles, and/or tremble. Body weight may be distributed unevenly (stretching forward, leaning away).

Behavior:Dog seems aware of the environment but does not actively explore (sniffing and movement). May remain immobile or may move with significant/prolonged hesitation.

*Alternatively,* dog may pace, look for an escape route, or move in a very vigilant, nervous (but not panicked) manner. May be focused on the exit/getting away. May startle, showing poor recovery afterward, becoming more tense or agitated. When in the presence of a person or stimulus or when handled, dog seems aware but does not approach or actively avoid. May remain immobile and stiff, lean away, or may move away with significant/prolonged hesitation. May be resistant or difficult to position for leashing for the average person. May startle or flinch in response to touch, showing poor recovery afterward by becoming more tense or avoidant or by repeatedly flinching.

# Severe Fear (FAS 4-5)

Body: Dog’s body is very tense/rigid. Tail is very low or tucked, ears are back, and eyes are wide. May crouch, flatten body against the ground, tremble, or pant heavily.

Behavior: Dog may be completely immobile most of the time. May try to hide underneath or behind objects or cram body against a wall or into a corner. May seem “stuck” in a position (sitting, standing in place, or lying down). May stare into space or appear to “fall asleep,” especially when forced into close proximity with a person. May be catatonic (a severe fear response that includes very tense muscles, lack of movement, and unresponsiveness to environmental or social stimuli or interaction).

*Alternatively,* dog may show active avoidance, pacing, fleeing, or persistently seeking an escape route. May show extreme agitation or vigilance. May startle, showing no recovery afterward, becoming more tense or agitated. May scream. May crawl along the ground. May lose control of bladder or bowels or express anal glands. May vigorously try to escape. May be difficult or impossible to leash or position for handling, for the average person, and a person may not be able to complete the activity with the dog.

**Considerations**

Fear may overlap with aggression. If a dog escalates to the point where there is concern for human safety, please refer to the Canine Risk Assessment.