

AGILITY DOG CLUB OF NEW SOUTH WALES INC

Dog Arousal and Aggression Policy¹

[Adopted 10 March 2022]

1. Introduction

The Agility Dog Club of NSW aims to provide a fun, stimulating and welcoming atmosphere for ALL handlers and their dogs. The Club promotes responsible dog ownership and dog training. The Club recognises that from time to time members will bring dogs to the Club as a part of their efforts to overcome behavioural problems including reactivity and aggression. Further, it is recognised that some dogs may become highly aroused when exposed to the stress and excitement of Agility and may pose a risk to other club members and their dogs.

As far as possible the Club aims to help members to train their dogs to behave appropriately. However the safety of members and their dogs is paramount at all times. Accordingly, this policy provides a framework to identify and document incidents where dogs behave inappropriately so that (i) action can be taken to protect the safety of members and their dogs and (ii) action can also be taken, where possible, to support the education of members and the training and management of dogs involved in incidents.

This policy applies to incidents that occur on the Club's grounds or at approved events at other locations with the following exceptions: incidents that occur during (i) Dogs NSW sanctioned club events (such as agility trials) or (ii) ADAA sanctioned club events (such as agility trials). These are covered by *Dogs NSW Aggressive Dog Regulations and Incident Report* and the *Agility Dog Association of Australia Ltd regulations Version 11th edition*²

2. Policy context

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Club's - *Constitution and Club Rules / Ground Rules*.

3. Definitions

Club official

A club instructor, member of a Sub-committee, member of the Committee or member of the Executive.

Committee

The Club's Elected Committee as per section 43 of the Club's Constitution.

Executive

The Club's Elected Office Bearers as per section 43 of the Club's Constitution.

Training Subcommittee

Comprises the Chief Education Officer or the Chief On Ground Training Officer.

Incident book

A written record kept by the Club of incidents including the date, parties involved and accounts of the incident.³

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Minor incident

An incident where:

- a dog persistently harasses another dog; or
- a dog makes, or attempts to make, inappropriate physical contact with another dog but does not cause injury; or
- a dog persistently lunges or runs towards another dog in an aroused or aggressive manner but does not make physical contact; or
- a dog behaves aggressively towards a person, but not so as they reasonably fear that they are going to be attacked; or
- a similar act of arousal or aggression where no injury or reasonable fear of injury occurs.

Review group

A panel of three instructors comprising

- I. an instructor serving in the training class relating to the incident,
- II. an instructor serving on the Committee, and
- III. either The Chief Education Officer or The Chief On Ground Training Officer.

Each instructor shall have at least three years experience at the Club. Members of the review group must not be a party to the documented incident or a witness to the documented incident.

Major incident

An incident where:

- I. a dog causes injury to a person or dog; or
- II. a dog behaves in such a way that a person reasonably fears they are going to be attacked or injured by that dog; or
- III. a dog behaves in an aroused or aggressive manner that is more serious than a minor incident.

President

The person performing the role of President as per section 43(a - (i)) of the Constitution.

Secretary

The person performing the role of Secretary as per section 43(a - (iv)) of the Constitution.

Sub-committee

A sub-committee approved by the Elected Committee as per section 66 of the Constitution.

4. Responsibilities of club members

Club members are responsible for the behaviour of the dogs under their care on the club grounds and must strive to minimise the risk of unsafe or inappropriate behaviour by complying with club rules and following the direction of club officials.

Failure to comply with a formal direction arising from an incident under this policy may be grounds for cessation of membership under section 34 of the Constitution.

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5. Assessing dogs for unsociable or aggressive behaviour

In some circumstances the breed of dog is noted for unsociable behaviour. In other situations the dog may have experienced some trauma (often unknown to the owner) that has triggered the unsociable or aggressive nature of the dog.

During either the Intro To Agility course or an ADC assessment night all Handlers and Dogs will be assessed regarding the dog(s) ability to socialise with humans and other dogs. This assessment will be completed using two checks.

1. During the assessment, either a member of the Club's Executive or Training Subcommittee will verbally request from the handler an understanding of their dog's socialisation abilities, or if the dog is known to have an unsociable or aggressive behaviour.
2. Post assessment but before the dog starts or returns to class, either a member of the Club's Executive or Training Subcommittee will physically meet and greet each dog and make an assessment of the dogs socialisation abilities.

If the dog shows any signs of unsociable or aggressive behaviour, then a member of the Club's Executive or Training Subcommittee may seek a second opinion to independently assess the dog.

Using the guidelines from the review of documented incidents, a member of the Club's Executive or Training Subcommittee shall determine the most appropriate form of management for the dog. This may include a safety first approach where the dog is required to wear a bandana⁵, and/or muzzle until such time as the dog has interacted with both humans and other dogs and a more accurate assessment can be made.

A dog(s) identified by the ADC as being unsociable or aggressive, or have been involved in an incident at the ADC grounds, will be continually assessed for signs of behavioural improvement.

6. Dealing with incidents

Parties involved in an incident and any club officials in the vicinity should attempt to defuse an incident as quickly as possible drawing on their own skill, experience and judgment. Care should be taken to avoid injury to people or dogs when defusing an incident.

A club official may direct any party involved in an incident to take immediate action as soon as the incident is defused to minimise any further risk to members and their dogs. Such action may include, but is not limited to, removing a dog from a specific part of the grounds (including a training environment), leaving the grounds completely, and prohibiting access to the grounds until further notice.

Any club official who issues an oral direction to a party involved in an incident that places restrictions on further class involvement or grounds access must confirm the direction in writing to the affected party as soon as practicable after the incident and no later than 24 hours after the incident.

To minimise further risks to members and/or their dogs, any dog involved in an incident must not be left unattended on the grounds after an incident.

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7. Documenting incidents

Responsibility for documenting an incident rests with a club official that is present during an incident. A club official may use their judgement in determining whether an incident of a minor nature should be documented taking into account the definition of 'minor incident' and the context in which the incident occurred. All major incidents must be documented (see 'Definitions' above).

Where no club official is present at an incident, a member may report the incident to a club official.

Where a club official deems that documentation is warranted, accounts of incidents must be documented in the Club's Incident Book.

Parties directly involved in an incident must be informed if the incident is documented and they must be treated with courtesy at all times.

The club official who takes responsibility for documenting an incident should provide an opportunity for the parties involved and any other witnesses to the incident to submit written accounts of the incident as soon as possible after the event.

Written accounts should identify who was involved, where the incident happened, what happened, what immediate action (if any) was taken and by whom.

8. Review of documented incidents

The club official who documents an incident or receives an account of an incident from a club member must notify a member of the Club's Executive or Committee and a member of the Training Subcommittee as soon as practicable after the event. The Executive and Training Subcommittee will jointly determine whether the incident is deemed 'minor' or 'major' according to the definitions in this policy.

The Executive and Training Subcommittee may deem an incident 'minor' and consider that the action taken at the time of the incident was adequate and agree that no further action is required. Alternatively, they may elect to refer a minor incident to a review group for investigation. All incidents deemed 'major' must be referred to a review group.

All incidents documented in the Incident Book must be reported to the next available Committee meeting in accordance with the Club's constitution. This is the responsibility of the Training Subcommittee.

A review group must be established and convened as soon as practicable after The Executive and Training Subcommittee have determined that a review is necessary. It is the responsibility of the Training Subcommittee to ensure that this happens and to liaise with the review group on the progress of the review. The Executive and Training Subcommittee shall nominate the members of the review group subject to the definition in this policy.

When reviewing an incident the review group will:

- attempt to contact all parties involved in the incident to inform them of the review;
- consider the details of the incident as documented in the Incident Book;
- consider any further information sought or provided by any party involved in the incident;
- consider any further information sought or provided by witnesses to the incident;
- consider any information sought or provided by veterinary or medical practitioners involved after the incident;
- take into account any other information the review group considers relevant.⁴

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The review group will then, drawing on their own experience and training, prepare a report and make written recommendation(s) to the President.

Recommendations may include, but are not limited to, any of the following:

- I. that no further action is taken;
- II. that the people involved are counselled;
- III. that changes are made to club policies and/or practices;
- IV. that specific management strategies are put in place during class activities;
- V. that the dog is required to wear a 'give me space' vest (or similar 'high visibility' training equipment) while on the grounds;⁵
- VI. that the dog is required to wear a muzzle while on the grounds;
- VII. that the dog is required to be leashed at all times on the grounds;
- VIII. that the dog is banned from certain parts of the grounds (eg off-lead areas);
- IX. that the dog is banned from certain training activities for a prescribed or indefinite period;
- X. that the dog is required to pass a prescribed 'temperament' test before commencing or recommencing certain training activities;
- XI. that the owner is advised to seek advice from a recognised professional (eg veterinarian behaviourist or qualified behavioural trainer) at the owner's cost;⁶
- XII. that the dog is banned from the club grounds for a prescribed or indefinite period; and/or
- XIII. that the dog may only return to the club grounds and/or club activities following reassessment by a recognised professional acceptable to the Club.

It is recognised that some of these recommendations will preclude some dogs (and their owners) from participating in club activities. In weighing up the effect of any recommendations, the safety of members and their dogs must be the paramount consideration.

9. Role of the President and the Committee

The President must table the review group's report at the next available Committee meeting for the Committee's consideration. If this meeting is unduly delayed and urgent action is required to ensure the safety of members and their dogs, the President may issue an interim direction to a member or members involved in an incident based on the recommendation(s) of the review group. An interim direction may be given orally but must be followed-up in writing within 24 hours.

At the next available meeting, the Committee may endorse, modify or revoke any interim direction given by the President and any recommendation(s) made by the review group. As soon as practicable after the meeting, the President (or their delegate) must inform the parties involved in the incident of the outcome of the Committee's decision. This may be done orally but must be followed-up in writing within 24 hours.

The President (or their delegate) may also communicate the outcome of the review process and the Committee's decision to other club officials on a case-by-case basis to ensure the safety of club officials, members and their dogs.

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10. Implementation of directions

After a period of not less than two months after the President (or their delegate) has communicated the Committee's decision a member who is subject to a direction may apply to the Committee (through the Secretary) to modify or revoke the direction. The Committee may make a decision to uphold, modify or revoke the direction or refer the matter to a review group for further consideration and recommendation.

¹ This policy supersedes the Club's *Ground Rules & Operating Procedures* (2019) and all subsequent amendments and the Clubs Operating Procedures.

² See <https://www.dogsnsw.org.au/members/regulations/> and <https://adaa.com.au/rules-and-regs/>.

³ Incident Books are kept in the club office. Incidents that occur during training and trialling should be recorded in the Agility Incident Book.

⁴ In the case of dog bites, the review group may refer to Dr Ian Dunbar's Dog Bite Scale. A copy of which is located at the end of this document.

⁵ Such as a yellow bandana recommended under the Yellowdog Australia Project (see <http://www.yellowdog-australia.k9events.com/>).

⁶ See the club's brochure *Canine behavioural training services for members* for professionals recommended by the club



Dr. Ian Dunbar's Dog Bite Scale (Official Authorized Version)

An assessment of the severity of biting problems based on an objective evaluation of wound pathology

Level 1. Obnoxious or aggressive behavior but no skin-contact by teeth.

Level 2. Skin-contact by teeth but no skin-puncture. However, may be skin nicks (less than one tenth of an inch deep) and slight bleeding caused by forward or lateral movement of teeth against skin, but no vertical punctures.

Level 3. One to four punctures from a single bite with no puncture deeper than half the length of the dog's canine teeth. Maybe lacerations in a single direction, caused by victim pulling hand away, owner pulling dog away, or gravity (little dog jumps, bites and drops to floor).

Level 4. One to four punctures from a single bite with at least one puncture deeper than half the length of the dog's canine teeth. May also have deep bruising around the wound (dog held on for N seconds and bore down) or lacerations in both directions (dog held on and shook its head from side to side).

Level 5. Multiple-bite incident with at least two Level 4 bites or multiple-attack incident with at least one Level 4 bite in each.

Level 6. Victim dead.

The above list concerns unpleasant behavior and so, to add perspective:

Levels 1 and 2 comprise well over 99% of dog incidents. The dog is certainly not dangerous and more likely to be fearful, rambunctious, or out of control. Wonderful prognosis. Quickly resolve the problem with basic training (control) — especially oodles of Classical Conditioning, numerous repetitive Retreat n' Treat, Come/Sit/Food Reward and Back-up/Approach/Food Reward sequences, progressive desensitization handling exercises, plus numerous bite-inhibition exercises and games. Hand feed only until resolved; do NOT waste potential food rewards by feeding from a bowl.

Level 3: Prognosis is fair to good, provided that you have owner compliance. However, treatment is both time-consuming and not without danger. Rigorous bite-inhibition exercises are essential.

Levels 4: The dog has insufficient bite inhibition and is very dangerous. Prognosis is poor because of the difficulty and danger of trying to teach bite inhibition to an adult hard-biting dog and because absolute owner-compliance is rare. Only work with the dog in exceptional circumstances, e.g., the owner is a dog professional and has sworn 100% compliance. Make sure the owner signs a form in triplicate stating that they understand and take full responsibility that: 1. The dog is a Level 4 biter and is likely to cause an equivalent amount of damage WHEN it bites again (which it most probably will) and should therefore, be confined to the home at all times and only allowed contact with adult owners. 2. Whenever, children or guests visit the house, the dog should be confined to a single locked-room or roofed, chain-link run with the only keys kept on a chain around the neck of each adult owner (to prevent children or guests entering the dog's confinement area.) 3. The dog is muzzled before leaving the house and only leaves the house for visits to a veterinary clinic. 4. The incidents have all been reported to the relevant authorities — animal control or police. Give the owners one copy, keep one copy for your files and give one copy to the dog's veterinarian.

Level 5 and 6: The dog is extremely dangerous and mutilates. The dog is simply not safe around people. I recommend euthanasia because the quality of life is so poor for dogs that have to live out their lives in solitary confinement.