

Northwoods Humane Society – Deanna Persson, President

Animals new to our shelter are medically assessed, as is their temperament. It is an important part of insuring a successful adoption. This helps make shelter life peaceful and safe for both the animals, staff and volunteers. Part of the adoption process dogs is a meet and greet to assess the interaction of our dog with other family dogs. We also assess how dogs are with cats. The following was prepared by our shelter manager, Alecia Austin and posted on our Facebook site – Dealing with Dog Aggression Towards Other Pets.

Bringing a new dog into your home – or trying to maintain harmony among your existing pets – should be a joyful experience. But sometimes it can be overshadowed by a serious challenge: aggression toward other animals in the household. Whether it's barking, growling, snapping, or full-on fights, dog – to-dog or dog-to-cat aggression can be stressful for pets and people.

With patience, consistency and the right approach, many dogs can learn to get along peacefully with other pets.

First, understand 'WHY'. Before you can change behavior, it helps to understand where it is coming from. Dogs can show aggression toward other pets for several reasons: 1. Fear or anxiety – your dog might feel threatened or uncomfortable around other animals. 2. Resource guarding – some dogs get territorial over food, toys, people or spaces. 3. High prey drive – dogs with strong hunting instincts may react aggressively toward smaller animals, including cats. 4. Pain or illness – an underlying health issue can make a normally tolerant dog irritable or reactive. 5. Frustration or lack of impulse control – dogs with pet-up energy or poor boundaries may lash out, especially in high-energy situations. 6. Past trauma or bad experiences with other animals. Aggression isn't about dominance or being a "bad dog" – it's usually about feeling unsafe or overwhelmed. Once you know what's triggering the aggression, you can start helping your dog feel secure.

**Step 1 – Safety First.** Before any training begins, take precautions to prevent injuries – your pets and yourself. 1. Separate animals when unsupervised, using gates, crates, or closed doors. 2. Use leashes and harnesses for controlled introductions or reintroductions. 3. Remove triggers like high-value toys or food bowls during interactions. 4. Never punish aggression with yelling or force. This can make the behavior worse.

If your dog has already bitten or seriously injured another animal, it is time to consult with a certified dog trainer or veterinary behaviorist. Aggression is serious, but it's also workable with the right help.

**Step 2 – Gradual introductions and positive associations:** Whether you're introducing a new pet or trying to repair a rocky relationship between longtime housemates, go slow.

**Start with scent:** Let them smell each other's bedding or toys before meeting face to face. 1. Use barriers: begin with baby gates or crates so the pets can see and smell each other without direct contact. 2. Reward calm behavior with treats and praise. 3. Short, controlled meetings: Allow brief leashed introductions in neutral territory, like the backyard and slowly increase the duration. 4. Watch body language: Look for signs of stress like stiff posture, growling, lip licking or hard staring. If you see them, end the session calmly and try again later. Keep the sessions short, positive and low-pressure. Think progress, not perfection.

Step Three; Teach Calm and Control – Dogs who struggle with aggression often lack the ability to self-regulate or respond to cues in high-stress moments. That’s where consistent training comes in. Basic obedience is your foundation. Teach cues like “sit, leave it, stay and look at me” in calm environments. Impulse control games like “wait” or “got to mat” help your dog learn to pause before reacting. Use desensitization and counter conditioning to change how your dog feels about other pets. Pair the sight or presence of the other animals with something your dog loves – like cheese, chicken or a favorite toy. Eventually, your dog will begin to associate the other pet with good things instead of feeling anxious or reactive.

#### Step Four: Daily Management and Long-Term Support

Even with progress some dogs may never be best friends with other pets – and that’s okay. Focus on creating a peaceful environment where every can feel safe. Maintain structured routines to reduce chaos and uncertainty. Give each pet their own space to eat, sleep, and relax with pressure. Provide outlets for energy with walks, puzzles and playtime. Celebrate the wins, no matter how small. Peaceful coexistence is a major success! If needed, don’t hesitate to work with a fear-free certified trainer or animal behaviorist. These professionals can create a personalized plan to help your dog improve safely and effectively.

Dates to Save: - April 17 and May1 – Bingo at Powell’s on Round Lake – 6 p.m.

April 26 – Spay-ghetti and No Balls and Baking Contest– Hayward Vet Center 5 – 7 p.m.

May 23 – Dining For Cats and Dogs – Lynn’s Custom Meats and Catering – 10:30 a.m. to 2 p.m.