



Tips to prepare for housing and care of animals from a dogfighting case:

If your shelter is preparing for animals coming in from a dogfighting case, below are some important things to consider when caring for these dogs in a shelter setting. Please note that every group of animals is different and will come with their own unique set of requirements, but these are some general tips to get you started.

- Criminal cases:
 - If the animals are seized from an open investigation, the disposition of the dogs must be determined by the court. Measures should be taken to ensure the security of the dogs while in the shelter's care. Animals with a fighting history can be valuable and a target for theft, so dogs should be housed in an isolated area that is not accessible to the public until the animals have been cleared. Consider increasing security measures such as surveillance cameras, or locks on kennel gates.
 - While the animals are being held as live evidence, it is important that only authorized personnel take photos and/or share information pertaining to the case so not to compromise confidential information.
 - It is imperative that evidence pertaining to the case be properly collected, documented, and tracked as it changes hands. Consult with legal authorities for advice on documentation and sharing of information regarding the animals.
 - Continue to document animals' medical conditions while in your care, not just on intake. Treat photos of conditions, medical records, sample collections, etc. as evidence, and remember that veterinarian opinion is fundamental to any legal case.

- Housing considerations:
 - House dogs in sturdy kennels with secure tops and use carabiners to secure gate latches to prevent escape. Ensure any kennel cards or signage are not within the dogs' reach.
 - If dogs will be housed in kennels where they can see other animals, use of visual barriers such as sheets of FRP or polywall cut to fit the kennel gate or walls will help to reduce the dogs' stress levels. Hang these by using carabiners or heavy-duty zip ties out of the dogs' reach.
 - *FRP or polywall are preferred over the use of blankets or towels as dogs will often pull these into their kennels and chew them up.*
 - If possible, place an empty kennel(s) beside any dogs who are particularly struggling with reactivity, to provide more space between them and other dogs.
 - When walking dogs past kennels with other dogs in them, use caution and keep a short leash to prevent contact at the kennel gate. Use high value treats or a tug toy as a distraction or place a visual barrier before movement, if needed.

- Extra enrichment:

- Dogfighting dogs are highly intelligent with an abundance of energy and often struggle in a kennel environment without proper stimulation. Providing long-lasting enrichment items in-kennel such as goughnuts, knucklebones, peanut butter frisbees secured to kennel fronts, or bowling ball toys with wet food or peanut butter frozen in the holes can offer an outlet for some of that energy. Soft toys or beds are not recommended.
 - *Caution should be used with hard enrichment items for dogs with broken or worn-down teeth, and to ensure pieces are not being ingested.*
- Mental stimulation is also an important outlet. Setting aside small amounts of time to do training with the dogs, such as treating for “four on the floor” or teaching basic cues like “sit” or “touch” will exercise their brains and help with behavior in-kennel. This can be done with direct or indirect contact with the dog.
- Depending on the dog’s temperament, taking dogs out of their kennels for regular exercise will bring down their stress levels. Walks in quiet areas, time in an outside yard with visual barriers, or playgroups for dogs who have been assessed and cleared for dog-dog interactions are all great options. For dogs who require more caution when handling, you can offer protected contact tug through a barrier with the handler on the outside. Ensure you have a distracter for ending the session such as high value treats, or trade for another toy for dogs who aren’t food motivated.
- Safety measures:
 - Always notify other staff or volunteers when these dogs are moving throughout the shelter so there are no accidental run-ins with other animals. If possible, use a radio to communicate movement.
 - Have a safety bucket in areas where dogs will be out with people or other animals. Contents may include: airhorn, citronella spray, pet corrector, break stick. Ensure any staff or volunteers who will be handling the dogs are educated on the proper use of these tools and when to use them.
- Additional Considerations:
 - Psycho-pharmaceuticals can be another helpful tool to manage behavioral concerns in dogfighting dogs if all other options to maintain the animal’s mental health have been exhausted. Consult with a veterinarian on which medications to use for specific cases, as well as legal authorities before prescribing. Ensure all medications and follow ups are documented in the animal’s medical record. Once started, do not discontinue these medications without determining a weaning protocol. Inform potential fosters or adopters that animals will require follow up to continue or cease these medications.
 - Many of these animals are highly trained and conditioned, and can be exceptionally strong, particularly when it comes to pulling, so staff and volunteers who are handling the animals should use situational awareness and ensure proper handling methods, utilizing necessary tools for safety.