

Chapter 10 – Euthanasia Policy

The Policy

SOAR has historically euthanized very few dogs when compared to other rescue groups. However, because we don't always know the true background on each of the dogs we bring into rescue, we sometimes find ourselves faced with the reality that we may have accepted a dog into rescue that has been tormented, neglected and/or abused. Euthanasia is a reality for SOAR and any rescue group because sometimes the damage is too severe to repair.

Before accepting any dog into rescue it is good practice to make a phone call to the current veterinarian.

In 2001, a beautiful Airedale was surrendered to rescue. The family did not inform rescue or the foster family that their dog had a history of biting. In fact the Airedale had multiple biting incidents and the family had been ordered NOT to place or otherwise do anything with the dog if they decided not to keep it. A member of the foster family was seriously bitten! The dog was immediately seized by animal control and ultimately euthanized. If the veterinarian had been contacted prior to accepting this Airedale into rescue, this tragedy could have been prevented.

SOAR will not knowingly place a vicious or otherwise seriously temperamentally unsound animal in an adoptive home. Dogs who have bitten without cause will not be re-homed.

Dogs who we discover through fostering and handling to have temperament issues need to be evaluated!



When a call comes in to take an “aggressive dog” the detective work begins. Sometimes an Airedale is described as aggressive when he is just exhibiting typical young Airedale behavior. The owner is simply unprepared to deal with a large, rowdy, active puppy that is play biting and mouthing.

If you receive a call to take an aggressive Airedale into rescue, a careful history **MUST** be taken to determine if it is truly temperament problem or owner inexperience. Ask if either the vet or groomer has ever had problems handling the dog. The dog may need to be visited by a SOAR volunteer and a trainer you respect.

SOAR's president needs to be consulted before any decision is made about accepting a dog if it is reported the dog has bitten or is aggressive.



If we have to refuse to accept an Airedale in rescue because of temperament problems we can offer the family other resources for training in their area should they wish to keep the dog. **Discourage them from taking the dog to a shelter.** This is a terrible experience for the dog, and will only prolong his suffering. If they are unable to manage him, in all likelihood someone off the street will be unable to also. The kindest thing is euthanasia with the family who he knows at his side. SOAR cannot provide Web space, foster homes, or adoption forms for these dogs. To do so is to *imply* that we are approving the adoption, and that exposes SOAR to a lawsuit should a bite occur.

The decision of what constitutes vicious or otherwise seriously temperamentally unsound animal will be reached by committee along with the report of someone who is hands-on with the dog (see below for procedures.) The advice of a trainer, additional SOAR volunteers, or veterinarian will be sought to ensure adequate perspective before a final decision is made.

If the Airedale has already been accepted in Rescue and is demonstrating some form of assertive or aggressive behavior, many SOAR volunteers who have experience with training or know of excellent trainers in their area will assist with the evaluation. Communicate with the rescue contacts. All training MUST be positive.

We do NOT condone negative or ALPHA training methods! NO shock collars. These methods only increase aggression and make the problem worse. (Bark collars are allowed if removed at night.)



The SOAR president needs to be aware if you have a dog with a significant behavior problem in rescue. A discussion needs to take place with the trainer about the problems exhibited and the potential for rehabilitation.

Serious dog-on-dog aggression, when combined with other behavior problems, is also a consideration for euthanasia. People who adopt these dogs face a lifetime of challenge trying to keep them "safe" from confronting other dogs on the street, at the groomers, and in the vet's office. They face personal injury breaking up dogfights, or an attack themselves if their dog turns on them in frustration at not being able to get to the other dog they see.

We cannot use SOAR resources to board dogs with severe behavioral problems for long periods of time while we search for the "right" adoptive home. It isn't fair to the other dogs in rescue or to our donors and volunteers to spend rescue dollars on long-term boarding of dogs who are suffering from past physical and mental abuse that cannot be overcome or corrected. Rather than allow these dogs to be tormented by their past inexcusable abuse and torture, we must realize that euthanasia is a kind and peaceful way to allow such dogs to leave us. Our tears are only momentary; they do not deserve to continue suffering from whatever haunts them and causes them such fear!

We are all working together for the greater good of the Airedales we rescue. Every Airedale is special, but we must remember that a single lawsuit could end all the good work that we are accomplishing. SOAR maintains an insurance policy to protect our foster homes, but that insurance policy specifically excludes dogs that have a known history of biting. The volunteer who accepts a dog with an aggressive past into the rescue program is placing not only SOAR at risk, but is also setting the stage for a personal liability lawsuit should a bite occur.

One thing we have always endeavored to do is for a SOAR volunteer to be with a dog at the time of euthanasia so he or she doesn't face this alone. We have always felt it was important for any dog to hear a soothing voice and a warm touch at the very end.

The Procedures

Anyone who thinks that a dog might not be adoptable should make the SOAR president aware of the situation and provide as much written documentation as possible. A committee consisting of three senior SOAR volunteers and an Airedale trainer will make the decision (usually in no more than 48 hours, in most cases much less) AFTER reviewing as many of the facts as they can. They will need the following:

- Any and all documentation from professionals (vets, behaviorists, trainers)
- Documentation from anyone who had been involved with the dog in question.

The committee MUST have documentation from a vet, behaviorist or trainer. All documentation submitted must be in writing. E-mail is okay.