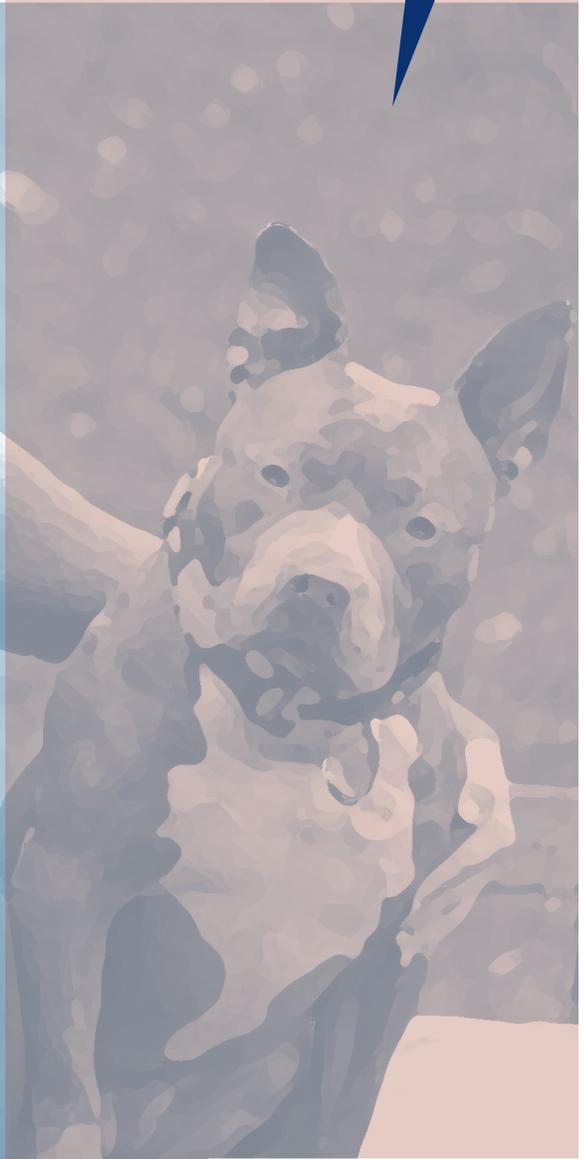


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RESOURCES FOR:

COMMUNICATIONS & MEDIA

TOOLS
FOR
CHANGE



SINCE 1985



RESOURCES FOR:

COMMUNICATIONS & MEDIA

Communicating about the issues that matter to us can be a new experience for many people working and volunteering in the animal welfare field. Expressing the facts — whether it's on television, in a Letter to the Editor, or in front of a city council meeting — can be daunting. To succeed you need to be prepared, professional, and know how to get the word out!

In order to communicate effectively, it helps to think about your goals. What are your short and long term objectives? What action steps do you need to take to achieve these goals? The answers to these questions will help you design a communications plan that works. If there are multiple people within your organization, it may be a good idea to appoint one individual as the spokesperson for your group and then determine your plan.

No matter what your strategy for change will be, communicating with the media, the public, and elected officials will likely be a part of your work. To help you communicate more effectively, we've put together the following resources.

In this packet you'll find the following:

- TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY AND COMMUNICATIONS
- TIPS FOR TALKING WITH THE MEDIA
- HOW TO WRITE A PRESS RELEASE
- HOW TO WRITE AN OP/ED OR LETTER TO THE EDITOR
- HOW TO WRITE A LETTER TO AN ELECTED OFFICIAL
- HOW TO ANSWER FAQs ABOUT "PIT BULL" DOGS
- FEAR VS. FACT SHEET

For more information, including the latest research, talking points, and handouts related to Breed Specific Legislation, Adoption and Marketing Policies, and more, please visit our website:

www.animalfarmfoundation.org



For more information, please visit our website: www.animalfarmfoundation.org

Email: info@animalfarmfoundation.org • Phone: (845) 214-6908

The facts and data that support breed-neutral solutions already exist, as do talking points to help you use propose this approach to elected officials, community members, and policymakers. These resources have worked in overturning and blocking BSL in various communities. Access our reliable information and use it.

Effective advocates work to connect policymakers within their community to the research available from national experts.

Here are some tips to help you succeed in your communications:

BE KNOWLEDGEABLE:

Enter the Conversation Prepared

Before you do or say anything, always do your homework in order to assess the situation in your community. For example, what are the current laws in your community? When was BSL introduced and by whom? What are the dog bite statistics in your community?

Know the decision making cycle in your community. Is there a particular time of year open to voting or public forums?

Identify the problem as clearly as possible. Do not accept, as a starting point for discussion, that there is a problem if a problem does not exist. Often, it is the perception of a problem that sparks discussion of BSL.

Gather examples of targeted dogs that are benefitting your community, such as: therapy dogs, service dogs, hero dogs, and working dogs. Collect news clippings, letters of recommendation, and photos about these dogs.

Gather examples of other towns in your state with laws that target irresponsible dog owners and dangerous dogs, instead of BSL.

Be prepared with accurate, science-based information that will refute false information.

Know your audience and what they value. Identify and focus on the “community of interest” and how BSL will impact them. Adjust your message according to who you are addressing.

BE COMPASSIONATE:

We're All Human

Try to find compassion for the people who propose or support discriminatory legislation or policy. It helps if you find the common ground that we all share. We have more in common than we might initially think!

If it is appropriate to do so, speak with the person who has proposed BSL and have a respectful, honest conversation with them. The goal here is not to argue, but to come away with a better understanding of their concerns, fears, and the issues as they understand them. Be calm and considerate.

BE RELATABLE:

Start with Safety, Similarities, and Stick to the Facts

Recognize that policymakers must work with all of their constituents, including those with opposing viewpoints. Always start the conversation with safety.

Acknowledge your common values, beliefs, and experiences. Similarities between a communicator and an audience increases persuasiveness. For example: We all want reckless dog owners to be held accountable for their actions.

Emphasize that like all concerned parties, dog owners (including “pit bull” dog owners) want to live in safe communities. No matter how different we may seem, we all have this one goal in common: safe communities.

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Ask about and really listen to their objections. Keep communication open and stress the similarities, rather than the differences, between you.

Stick to the facts. Show them the overwhelming research that supports that BSL is not an effective method of building safe communities.

BE CREDIBLE:

Be Confident in the Science, Research, and Information

Limit emotional stories and avoid anecdotes. Frame any personal information with how the proposed or current laws will affect you and community.

Anticipate what statistics may be used to support BSL and be prepared to correct this misinformation by using the facts.

Offer solutions and support, rather than criticisms. Don't just focus on the problems of BSL – give examples of effective, non-discriminatory solutions that do work.

Keep restating your message clearly and in terms people can understand. Always answer charges or misinformation, and do so forcefully, calmly, and with facts.

You don't need to embellish anything with hyperbole. Let the science, research, and information you have access to prove your point. Know the facts and use them!

BE PROFESSIONAL:

Polite and Nonpartisan

Keep all communications positive and professional.

Always treat everyone with respect. Try to understand their positions and alleviate their fears.

Leave your personal politics at home. Incorporating other political or animal welfare matters detracts from the issue at hand.

Dress professionally. Wear a business suit, if possible. You're asking for a seat at the table: show them that you take this issue seriously and that you deserve their respect.

BE SUCCESSFUL:

How to Give Effective Testimony

Identify yourself as a community member first and a dog owner second. For example: "I am an elementary school teacher and a church volunteer, and I also have a 'pit bull' dog", then state how long you have lived in the community.

Keep your testimony short and to the point. Try not to repeat what other speakers have said. Be prepared to edit your statement as others speak.

Be respectful – even if someone speaks against your position.

Offer your appreciation that the opportunity to examine/discuss this important issue is being offered.

When you're finished speaking, thank your audience for listening and wait to see if they have questions for you. Answer any questions briefly and accurately to the best of your ability; if you don't know an answer, it's best to say so. Offer to provide that information at a later date.

If attending a council meeting, stay to the very end. Leaving after the BSL discussions are over will make it appear as if you do not care about other matters facing the community (and politicians notice!). Show them you care about your community as a whole – not just when your dogs are affected.

Finally, it's helpful to remember that not every conversation or hearing will be a victory. Don't get frustrated if you aren't able to change someone's mind or policies on the first try. You've planted effective seeds for change that will make a difference one day!

*Please see our **BSL Talking Points** for more information and the facts you need to make a difference.*

1. KNOW YOUR MESSAGE

Develop your key message. What is the most important point that you want to get across? When delivering your message, think in terms of PSA: Problem, Solution, Action.

What is the problem your organization is trying to solve, what is the solution, and what specific action can the audience take to help? How will you get that message across in 10 seconds?

2. PICK THREE KEY POINTS TO REHEARSE

Try not to tackle too many issues at once. Always have your key points ready and rehearsed. Know what you want to say ahead of time. Too many messages might get confusing, so try to pick three key points to prepare in advance. These are the things you want to make sure you get across clearly during your interview. Practice, practice, practice.

3. BE TV READY

How you look on camera is an important part of how your audience will perceive you and your message. Studies show that people are more receptive to messages delivered by people using positive body language (like nodding “yes”), so be conscious of your movements.

Dress like an expert! Leave the dog t-shirts at home and pick a professional outfit that will convey that you are a trusted source. Stripes and patterns can look funny on camera, so stick to solid colors.

Be visually positive. Unless it would be inappropriate, smile. Project confidence by standing tall or sitting forward. Look at the reporter, not the camera. Speak in a conversational tone.

If you're bringing animals on to the set, be sure to practice with them beforehand. If there will be multiple animals on set, introduce them prior to going on air, and have one handler per animal.

When delivering your message, try to make it personal to develop a connection with your audience. You might say, “As a mother and a “pit bull” dog owner...”

Slow down. It's OK to pause and take a deep breath or to pause and start over again. In fact, every time you start to say “um,” just take a breath instead.

The slower and steadier your response, the more reasonable and in control you will come across. This is particularly important if you are answering difficult interview questions. The goal is to look calm and collected, not hostile or defensive.

4. KEEP IT SIMPLE AND SHORT

The best way to avoid being misquoted or edited poorly is to remember: Keep it Simple and Short (KISS).

The more you ramble on, the more likely it is that you'll be misquoted. You don't need to explain everything, so keep it brief. Stick to your main points and key messages. When you've finished answering a question, don't feel compelled to fill a silence by continuing to talk. On-the-scene interview segments are often cut down to 8-15 second sound bites.

If you get asked a bad or antagonistic question, respond with your message, rather than stumbling on the answer.

5. HOW TO CONTROL THE INTERVIEW

No matter what you are asked, try to turn the question around so that you can share your message and key points. If a question is leading you down the wrong path, you can use a “bridging” statement to turn things around.

Bridging allows you to answer a question by responding with the information you really want to talk about, even if it’s not related to the question that was asked. Always say your message, even if it’s not what was asked of you!

The following example of bridging statements will help you to keep the interview on track and get your message out:

“I think the real issue/concern is ...”

“What’s important here is ...”

“Our main priority/commitment/goal is ...”

“The fact is ...”

“Good question, but let me remind you that ...”

6. TALKING ABOUT “PIT BULL” DOGS

Avoid sharing images of dogs engaged in fights. Ask ahead of time if the producers plan to use this type of footage and ask that they refrain.

Avoid describing the dogs in ways that evoke negative images that scare the public. Instead of “fighting dogs” or “bait dogs” use “victims of cruelty.” This reminds the audience that the dogs did not perpetrate crimes, human beings did.

Focus on the positive work you are doing and the impact it has on the dogs. Share success stories. Instead of focusing on past neglect or dog fighting rings, bring the positive to the forefront. You want the audience to connect with and adopt “pit bull” dogs, not fear them.

Have a call to action. Tell your audience how they can help: adopt, donate, foster, etc.

Don’t be a Chicken Little. Steer clear of framing issues as overwhelmingly negative (for example: “We have too many pit bulls at our shelter!”). If the public perceives a problem as too big, they will feel that their actions won’t make a difference and will refrain from getting involved.

If there has been a dog-related incident in your community and the reporter asks about it, here are some ways of dealing with this subject matter:

- If you do not know the specifics, do not speculate. Stick to sharing accurate information.

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- Place the responsibility on the humans. Any dog, of any breed or breed mix, can become dangerous in the hands of a reckless human. If there was a dog-related incident, the responsibility lies with the person.

- Put the size of the risk in context. The number of dog bites is at historic lows in this country. We are safer now than ever before!

- Focus on the individual. The actions of one dog do not represent an entire breed or mix of breeds. All dogs are individuals.

- Make it personal. “I care deeply about the issue of safety. I share my home with a “pit bull” dog and I am a responsible, valued member of this community.”

- Check your message for myths. Refrain from perpetuating myths about “pit bull” dogs. “Pit bull” dogs are not naturally aggressive; they do not have locking jaws or bite differently than other dogs; they do not have a higher tolerance for pain than other dog, they do not need specialized handling, it’s “not just how they were raised” that matters, etc.

- There are no physical or behavioral traits that are unique to pit bulls.

- Offer an alternative for the listener. Give them an opportunity to take some positive action. “We encourage anyone that is concerned about community safety, as we are, to advocate for breed neutral laws. Experts, including the White House, recommend this approach as the most effective way to create safer, humane neighborhoods.”

7. BE YOURSELF!

It’s important to be prepared, but since you’re not a seasoned media personality, you don’t have to appear to be one! Simply focus on being yourself: honest and respectable. This approach will endear you to viewers and help them to take you seriously.

Now that you’ve crafted your message and practiced with your key points, you’ll be ready for your big moment with a reporter.



HOW TO:

WRITE A PRESS RELEASE

A press release reports specific, but brief information about an event, circumstance, or other happening that is related to your organization. Press releases are submitted to local news outlets and online (via press release distribution websites) to let the media know about your events and organization. They can also lead to increased media coverage. Get more attention for your cause and organization by letting the press know in advance what's happening in your community.

HERE'S HOW TO WRITE A PRESS RELEASE:

(Your logo here)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:

John Smith

(555) 555-555

JohnSmith@yourgroup.com

CATCHY HEADLINE IN BOLD CAPS

Subtitle here – one-line descriptive to add explanation and info

(Your City, State, and the Date): Try to catch the journalist's interest right away. Briefly explain why this event or this information is important to their news outlet and the community. Give them the who, what, when, where, and why early on, so they don't have to search for the basic facts.

Tell them all the details that will make your event special and newsworthy – such as any education/training/voting/contests that will happen, plus how many people you're hoping will attend, why what you're doing is different, your goals for the event, etc.

Invite them to cover your event and to contact you for more details, photos, etc. If applicable, you can also tell them a short, moving story within the release. For example, if this is an adoption event, tell the story of a dog your shelter ushered into a successful new life, such as a "pit bull" dog that is now enjoying life with a local family or who is a therapy dog. This is also a good place to add a quote from a member of your organization.

Ask someone to proof what you have written and check for errors. Journalists will dismiss press releases that have blatant spelling, grammar, or punctuation errors!

To read sample press releases, Google: "How to Write a Press Release."

About (name or your organization): Include a paragraph at the end describing your group and its mission. Include your organization's website, address and phone number.

HOW TO:

WRITE AN OP/ED PIECE OR LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Most newspapers feature an "Op-Ed" and "Letters to the Editor" section in which readers and public figures can express viewpoints or respond to particular events. The Op-Ed and Letters to the Editor sections are among the most widely read sections of the newspaper. Publication of an Op-Ed or Letter to the Editor will assure your views about animal-related issues will reach a wide audience in your community.

Through these pieces and letters, you can generate community discussion about issues such as BSL or your local animal shelter policies. Your piece may interest your local news media as well and wind up creating additional coverage for issues or events that you're working on.

HOW TO WRITE AN OP/ED PIECE:

An Op-Ed is generally a short article expressing an opinion or viewpoint on a current news topic. Here are tips for getting published:

Be Timely: Editors need a reason why your viewpoint should be given attention right now, such as: the release of a significant research study, a recent or upcoming event, or responses to recent votes or ordinance changes.

Keep it Brief: In general, 600 to 750 words is the limit, but check the paper's online opinion page to find out its submission guidelines.

Focus on One Key Point: Make one point clearly and persuasively.

Be Clear: Simple language, with short sentences, ensures that all readers, even non-experts, can understand your point. For example, don't use acronyms like BSL, DBRF, or long, complex sentences.

Connect On a Human Level: Personal stories help explain and bring complicated issues to life.

State Your Recommendation: State your opinion on how to improve things.

Captive Concisely: Your first paragraph should draw the reader in by using a well-stated argument. If you choose to open with an anecdote, make sure you quickly get to the point.

Strong Finish: Be sure to summarize your argument in one strong final paragraph.

Include Contact Information: List your name, address, phone, and e-mail at the bottom.

HOW TO WRITE A LETTER TO THE EDITOR:

A letter to the editor is a very short response to an article that recently appeared in the publication.

Start Simple: Don't worry if you don't know the editor's name. A simple "To the Editor of the Daily Record" or just "To the Editor" is sufficient. If you have the editor's name, however, you should use it.

Be Brief: Generally, shorter letters (150-200 words) have a better chance of being published.

Be Bold: Grab the reader's attention with a strong first sentence. Tell them what you're writing about, and make them want to read more.

Start at Your Key Point: Quickly explain what the letter is about at the start. Don't make the editor or the general public wait to find out what you want to say. Tell them your key point at the beginning.

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Why It Matters: The importance of your topic may seem clear to you, but remember that the general public probably doesn't share your background about animal welfare issues. Explain the issue and its importance simply. Use plain language that most people will understand.

Share Evidence: If you are writing a letter discussing a past or pending action, clearly show why this will have good or bad results.

What Do You Want: Share suggestions about what could be done to improve the situation. Be specific.

Contact: Be sure to write your full name and title. Include your address, phone number, and e-mail address. Newspapers won't print anonymous letters, though in some cases they may withhold your name on request.

*To find facts and information from the experts to reference in your letters, please visit our **BSL Talking Points** eBook and our **website**.*



I ALWAYS THOUGHT
SOMEBODY
SHOULD DO
SOMETHING
ABOUT
BREED SPECIFIC
LEGISLATION.
THEN
I REMEMBERED . . .

I AM SOMEBODY.

KNOW YOUR LOCAL LAWS.
KNOW YOUR STATE LAWS.
KNOW YOUR POLITICIANS.
BE A PART OF THE PROCESS.

YOUR DOG IS COUNTING
ON YOU



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HOW TO:

WRITE A LETTER TO AN ELECTED OFFICIAL

A well-written personal letter is an effective way to communicate with your elected officials. They may already know about issues like BSL, but lawmakers may not understand how it affects you. A letter describing your experiences, observations, and opinions may help them to consider a certain action, policy, or upcoming vote. They want to hear from you, so please write to them!

HERE ARE SOME TIPS:

Know Your Reader: Get the name, title, and address of the official(s) who will make the decision about your issue.

Be Official: If you are writing to an elected official, show respect for the position by using the title of the office and the official's full name.

State Your Purpose: Right away, tell them why you are writing.

State General Impact: Tell them how a particular decision will affect your community by briefly summarizing the issue.

Share How It Affects You: Specifically describe the negative or positive ways the decision will impact you.

Share How it Will Affect Others: Who else will be affected and how?

Use Facts and Stats: Use statistics and facts to back up your claims.

Give Praise: Mention any past support the official has demonstrated for this issue.

Describe Desired Action: State specifically what action you and/or your group hope the official will take.

Offer Alternative: If you are writing in opposition, describe the alternative.

Offer Help: If you have time, offer to work with them to explore other options.

Close and Sign: Include your contact information.

*For more information, facts, and an example letter, please see our **BSL Talking Points** eBook.*

PIT BULLS DON'T HAVE LOCKING JAWS, BUT THEY DO BITE DIFFERENTLY, RIGHT?

No. This is a myth. There is nothing anatomically unique about the jaws of “pit bull” dogs.

DO PIT BULLS HAVE A HIGHER TOLERANCE FOR PAIN THAN OTHER DOGS?

No. This is a myth. There is nothing unique about the neurological system of a “pit bull” dog. All dogs, regardless of breed label, experience pain. How each dog responds to that pain will vary but the response cannot be predicted by breed.

ARE PIT BULLS MORE LIKELY TO CAUSE SERIOUS ATTACKS THAN OTHER BREEDS?

No. An American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) exhaustive review of dog bite studies conducted in North America and elsewhere has concluded that separate regulation of “pit bull” dogs is not a basis for dog bite prevention. “Serious bites occur due to a range of factors,” conclude these authors.

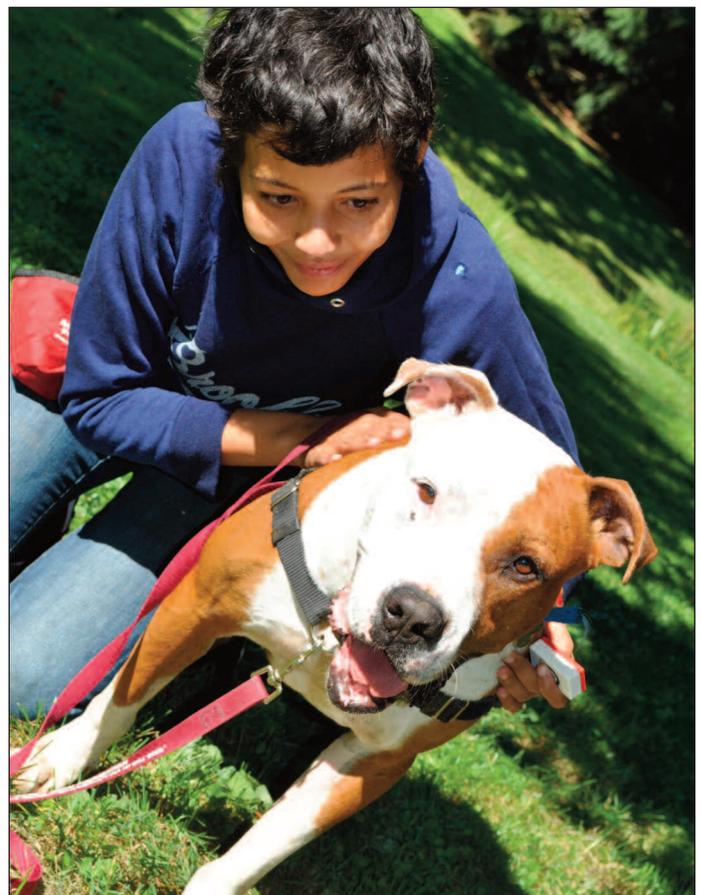
IF SO MANY OTHER DOGS ARE INVOLVED IN DOG BITES, HOW COME WE ONLY HEAR ABOUT PIT BULLS?

Sensationalized reporting equals big ratings for the media. Publishing and broadcasting stories about dog bites that are perceived to involve “pit bulls” - even if the dogs are not correctly identified - results in ratings. The fact is that with more than 78 million dogs in this country, many of them “pit bull” dogs, dog bites are at historic lows and we've never been safer.

For more information on dogs bites, please visit the National Canine Research Council:
<http://nationalcanineresearchcouncil.com>

IF PIT BULLS ARE SUCH GOOD DOGS, WHY ARE THEY FILLING UP THE SHELTERS?

There are many reasons shelters might see high numbers of dogs that they label “pit bulls”, for example: local breed specific polices may be making it difficult for families to keep their dogs. This is a particularly difficult issue for renters in some areas, where landlords aren't welcoming to large dogs or certain breeds. However, this is not a reflection on the “pit bull” dogs themselves. “Pit bull” dogs are also filling up many homes as family pets. In 2012 Vetstreet published a survey that reported the American Pit Bull Terrier was one of the most popular dogs in the country!



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WEREN'T PIT BULLS BRED TO FIGHT DOGS?

Historically, some American Pit Bull Terriers (APBTs) were bred for that purpose, but they were also bred to be family dogs and farm help. To look at the APBT through the narrow scope of dog fighting is to miss out on their long and positive history in our country as cherished companions.

Further, when we consider the history of “pit bull” dogs we need to look at the history of dogs in general. If we use “historically bred for” as an indicator of future behavior, for any kind of dog, we are showing an unsophisticated understanding of dog breeding, dog genetics and dog behavior. Breeding, conditioning, and training a dog for a specific purpose, no matter what that task may be, is a complex process.

It gets more confusing when we discuss “historically bred for” in regard to “pit bull” dogs because it misleads us into thinking that this is relevant to a group of dogs as diverse as the dogs called “pit bull” today, that have no agreed upon pedigree or even phenotype. Many dogs that are labeled as “pit bulls” are actually mixed breed dogs of unknown pedigree or other pure bred dogs. We cannot assume to know how a dog will behave based on guesses at their ancestry, nor can we know what specific role or task (if any) that the breeds present in their genetic make-up might have been purposely bred for or if they will present themselves in an individual dog's behavior.

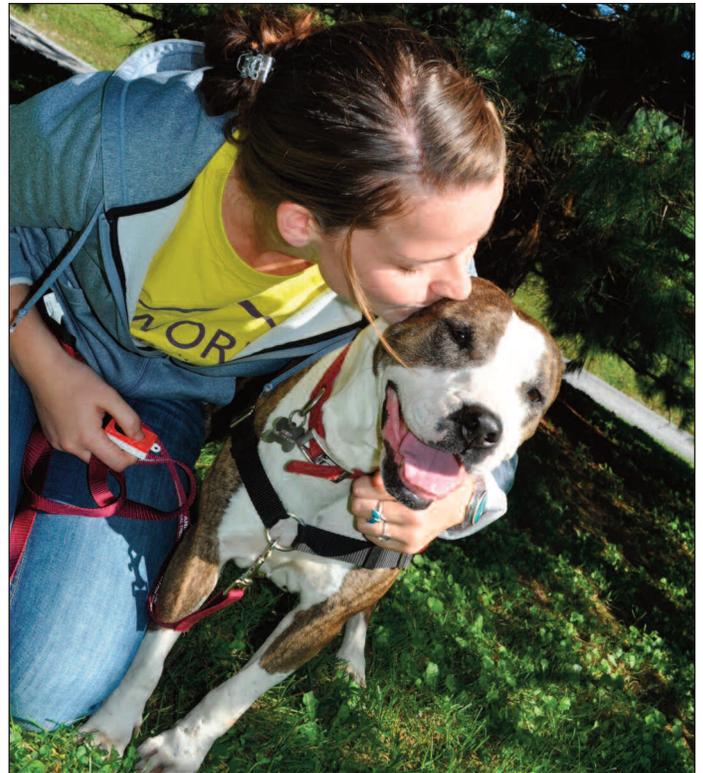
Rather than rely on “historically bred for” to make determinations about an individual dog, look at the dog in front of you.

ARE PIT BULLS BRED TO FIGHT DIFFERENTLY?

There is no behavior that is unique to one breed or type of dog. There is no valid scientific evidence that one breed or type of dog is uniquely capable of inflicting serious injury to humans or other animals.

WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH “BAIT DOGS”?

“Bait dog” is a term that is used to label dogs that have been used in dog fighting. Sadly, bait dogs do exist, but they are not commonly found in shelters. Law enforcement professionals have taught us that bait dogs are very rarely found alive in their investigations; however an unusually large number of dogs are being labeled as “bait dogs” based on nothing more than speculation about the dog's past.



FEAR: “Pit bull” dogs have “locking jaws.”

FACT: No dog, of any breed or mix, has an anatomical structure that could be a locking mechanism in their jaw.

“We found that the American Pit Bull Terriers did not have any unique mechanism that would allow these dogs to lock their jaws. There were no mechanical or morphological differences. . .” *Dr. I. Lehr Brisbin, University of Georgia*

FEAR: “Pit bull” dogs have massive biting power measuring in 1,000s of pounds of pressure per square inch (PSI).

FACT: On average, all dogs bite with approximately 320 lbs of pressure per square inch. This includes dogs commonly labeled “pit bull.”

The bite pressure of a German Shepherd, an American Pit Bull Terrier and a Rottweiler were tested. The American Pit Bull Terrier had the least amount of bite pressure of the three dogs tested. *Dr. Brady Barr, National Geographic*

FEAR: “Pit bull” dogs attack without warning.

FACT: All dogs, including dogs commonly labeled “pit bull”, signal their intent.

“Pit bulls signal like other dogs.” *The institute of Animal Welfare and Behavior of the University of Veterinary Medicine, Hannover, Germany temperament tested over 1,000 dogs.*

FEAR: While there are some “pit bull” dogs with good temperaments, they are the exception not the rule.

FACT: The American Temperament Test shows the American Pit Bull Terrier, American Staffordshire Terrier, and the Staffordshire Bull Terrier (three pure breed dogs, typically referred to as “pit bulls”), as well as the dogs labeled “Mixed Breed”, consistently score above the average for all breeds tested, year in and year out.

The American Temperament Test Society, www.atts.org

Every dog is an individual and should be evaluated as such.

FEAR: “Pit bull” dogs are more dangerous than other dogs.

FACT: There is no scientific evidence that one kind of dog is more likely than another to injure a human being than any other kind of dog.

“...Controlled studies have not identified this breed group [pit bull-type dogs] as disproportionately dangerous.”

American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA)
