



Sonoma County Animal Services Canine Collar Color Program

Color-coding is a common practice at many shelters that allows anyone to get a quick overview of how easy or challenging each individual dog appear. This is especially helpful for volunteers who may demonstrate varying levels of skill and comfort in handling dogs. A dog's color code is not a permanent status. As we all have seen, some dogs improve dramatically while at the shelter, while others do not adapt well to this environment and may even decline. Things that influence the dog's collar color may include:

- Shyness with people
- Jumping up and/or mouthing
- Ease of putting on and removing leash
- Pulling on leash
- Aggression or reactivity/barrier frustration towards other dogs
- Arousal level
- Size of dog
- Need for behavior modification
- Need for training
- Medical restrictions or special needs

A dog who displays any of the behaviors of an orange- or purple-level dog will be classified as orange or purple, even if the dog is very easy in every other way.

Collar colors are determined at the time of the behavioral assessment, and the level is identified by a green, orange or purple Martingale collar and/or a sticker of corresponding color placed in plain view on the kennel card. When the appropriate collar color is not available, refer to the color on the kennel card. A volunteer's skill level will be indicated by the name's background color on their badge.

Green, Orange and Purple Levels

Green Level

These dogs are well-adjusted and basically well-mannered. They may have moderate energy and need some basic leash manners and are overall easy to handle. Volunteers work on reinforcing calm behavior at the front of and before exiting the kennel, at doors, and while walking the dog on a loose leash. We encourage volunteers to not only focus on walking dogs, but also train and reinforce behaviors to help make the dogs more adoptable and provide enrichment (i.e., Kongs, nose work, puzzle toys, etcetera.) Volunteers can work with green-level dogs after attending volunteer orientation, completing the required trainings and shadowing a mentor.

Orange Level

These dogs will require more time and training. They may exhibit the following: shy and/or fearful behavior, jumping, and/or no leash manners. Green level volunteers should pair with orange or purple level volunteers for practice and take an orange collar class. Moving up to orange level requires assessment by an Animal Health Technician.

Purple Level

Purple level dogs tend to be strong, high energy, and/or exhibit behavior issues that need handle dogs of this level. Orange level volunteers may pair with a purple level volunteer for practices with these dogs. Volunteers must demonstrate to an Animal Health Technician the necessary skills in handling purple level dogs

Orange and Purple Assessments

Basic Skills

- Understand the differences between orange and purple level dogs
- Leashing and exiting the kennels with the dog
- Appropriately use collar and/or harness and leash
- Handle and manage dogs safely and appropriately
- Read dog body language and react appropriately
 - Identify timid and/or aggressive behavior, and whale eye
 - Enforce sit and wait before
 - putting on dog's collar and leash
 - taking dog out of the kennel
 - crossing thresholds (doors, crossroads, etc.) with the dog
- Know how to correct a dog that pulls on its leash
- Follow procedures and ensures safety when entering/exiting kennels
 - Look for and yield to staff cleaning or moving dogs through the kennels
 - Look for other volunteers getting dogs out of the kennels
 - Keep both hands on the leash
 - Ensure dog is focused on the volunteer (you)
- Manage reactivity and aggression appropriately (positive reinforcement)
- Use of redirection techniques

Walking

- Instruct and reward dog when loose-leash walking
- Manage dog safely
- Keep both hands on the leash
- Avoid interactions with other dogs, dog jumping on people or vehicles
- Use sit and wait when crossing streets

Play Yards

- Avoid interactions with other dogs
- Doesn't let dog jump up on people or other dogs
- Use toys appropriately
- Help dog avoid injuries (running along the fence, jumping/climbing over the fence)
- Use sit and wait when entering play yards, unleashing and leashing

Putting dog back in kennel

- Follow same process as leashing up and exiting the kennels
- Ensure that the kennel door is properly latched and locked
- Ensure the dog has water and refill, if needed
- Does not take the blanket from the top of the kennel and place it on the bed
- Takes away any toys the dog may have brought with it from the play yards
- May provide a Kong for enrichment

Overall

- Consistently and properly applies positive reinforcement techniques
- Utilizes proper leash management
- Demonstrates ability to train basic obedience through lure and reward
- Capable of taking dog off campus without assistance/interference from staff
- Takes and applies feedback