



Canine Catch-Neuter-Return (CNR) Good Practice Guides

Free-roaming dog welfare

Learning Outcomes:

1. Outline what is meant by 'welfare' and 'ethics'
2. Apply the five welfare needs of the dog in the CNR context
3. Evaluate the welfare of free-roaming dogs

When working with dogs in a Catch Neuter Return (CNR) it's important to know the difference between welfare and ethics, as each of us will differ in our opinions and beliefs.

The World Small Animal Veterinary Association describes animal welfare as "the physical and psychological, social and environmental well-being of animals". Ethics is a philosophical framework that allows us to make judgements about our own actions, and to decide what is right and wrong.

In short, welfare is about the subjective experience of the animal. Whereas, ethics is what we think about the animals' situation based on our own morals. It is important that we don't mistake our moral or ethical judgements for animal welfare problems. Instead, we have to objectively assess the impact of our actions on the dog, and not just assume that because our intentions are good, we will have a positive impact on dog welfare.

Dog welfare is what the DOG feels and experiences, ethics is what WE think and feel about the situation.

For example, some people will say "I think we should not desex dogs and cats as they have a natural right to reproduce". However, everything we do interferes with a dog or cat's 'rights' so instead of focusing on what we think the dog's rights are, we need to make the best decisions for their welfare.

Animal welfare can be measured scientifically by assessing the behavioural, physiological and immunological responses to a particular experience.

Dogs use their body language and behaviour to communicate how they are feeling to each other and to people. We can interpret dog body language and behaviour and thus identify negative emotional states, such as pain, fear or distress, or positive emotional states such as joy, contentment and interest.

Dog owners usually love their dog. But love is not enough, we must also provide for our dog's needs. Animals have needs of their own, and if these are not satisfied, this will negatively affect how the animal feels, resulting in poor animal welfare. In 2006, the five welfare needs were developed to be applicable to all domestic animals under human care, including working animals and pet animals. All pet owners should ensure that they are providing the five welfare needs to their own pets and working dogs.

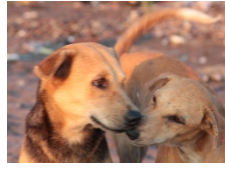
Canine Catch-Neuter-Return (CNR) Good Practice Guides



The need for a suitable environment



The need for a suitable diet



The need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns



The need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals



The need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease

Free-roaming street dogs experience both positive and negative welfare issues. They experience positive welfare such as social interaction with many other dogs and have behavioural freedom as they are not confined to a house or garden. The negative impacts on individual dog welfare include; increased risk of injury/trauma or bites, prevalence of disease, increased parasite load such as mange and ticks, reproductive exhaustion, and reduced access to resources such as food, water and shelter. These

Negative impacts on dog welfare increase as the dog population increases.

During the CNR process, we must consider individual dog welfare, because the benefits to the individual dog need to outweigh the risk to that dog's life during an intervention used to manage these free-roaming dog populations. CNR projects often consider the population as a whole with a focus on reducing the number of dogs, and this may result in the welfare of the individual dog being overlooked. Significant dog welfare problems can arise as a result, despite good intentions, for example injury during catching or pain during and after surgery.

If the dogs are handled inappropriately, experience fear, prolonged stress or unnecessary harm during the CNR process then this will not only negatively impact on the dog, but these dogs could also be an increased risk to the public upon release. This is because fearful or stressed dogs are more likely to escalate to aggressive behaviours, such as biting, when the dog is unable to escape from a situation. Additionally, the dog may associate humans with the fearful or painful experience that he or she had resulting in a poor dog-human relationship which could result in dog bite incidences. Most dog bites are driven by fear, and so if we can reduce a dog's fear of humans the dog is less likely to behave aggressively.

For more information on dog behaviour and handling, please see the video and supporting document on this subject.



Neckgraspers being used to handle a dog



Canine Catch-Neuter-Return (CNR) Good Practice Guides

The staff working in these projects should strive to be advocates for good dog welfare and promote a positive human-dog relationship. If communities see the staff interacting with the dogs and handling them with care and compassion, whilst explaining what the dog's behaviour and body language means, it may lead to a change in community attitudes towards dogs, potentially reducing human-dog conflict and even dog bites to humans in the communities.

Whilst it is challenging to provide the five welfare needs during CNR, we should always be trying to meet them as closely as possible. For example, by providing adequate pain relief to the dog, appropriate food prior to release, appropriate kennels or holding area for the dogs, and ensuring all staff are trained to use low-stress handling with the dogs.

Checklist:

- ✓ Free-roaming dogs experience a range of emotions, and may experience both positive and negative welfare while living on the streets
- ✓ Dog welfare is the physical and psychological, social and environmental well-being of animals
- ✓ Remember to provide the five welfare needs to animals under your care

References:

- Ryan, S., et al. (2019). "WSAVA Animal Welfare Guidelines." J Small Anim Pract 60(5): E1-E46.
- University of Edinburgh. Animal Welfare and Behaviour MOOC
<https://www.coursera.org/learn/animal-welfare>