

**Saving Grace Pit Bull Rescue: Stance on Euthanasia**

We are not a no-kill shelter. The decision to euthanize a rescue animal is extremely difficult for us. We are familiar with the debate involving euthanasia and understand that not all people may agree with our policy. Therefore, we would like to explain our reasoning and provide criteria we use to assist us in making these decisions. Our primary focus in considering euthanasia is the quality of life of the dog. We do not euthanize because dogs have special needs, require extra effort/attention or have no realistic chance at adoption. We have dogs who have been at our shelter for years. **We euthanize when quality of life cannot be maintained.**

According to worldwide animal rescue organization, RSPCA (Royal Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals), an animal has the right to five freedoms:

* **Freedom from Hunger and Thirst:** Requires provision of access to fresh water and a balanced diet that maintains health and energy
* **Freedom from Pain, Injury, and Disease:** Requires preventative measures and quick diagnosis and treatment/access to veterinary care
* **Freedom from Fear and Distress:** Requires ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering
* **Freedom from Discomfort:** Requires provision of appropriate environment, including shelter, clean and comfortable resting and sleeping areas
* **Freedom to Express Normal Behavior:** Requires provision of sufficient space, facilities, and animal/human interaction/company.

We agree that the above freedoms are essential for the well-being of any animal. Life in a shelter/kennel is difficult. Consider for a moment the quality of life if a prisoner. They are confined to a small space for a majority of the day with limited entertainment/activity. They may be allowed a small period of time outside. They likely will have little interaction with other humans. There are constant noises; talking, yelling, slamming doors. There is no privacy. There is constant visual and auditory stimulation. This life mimics the life of a dog who resides at a kennel. Dogs are social animals. A dog will decline physically and mentally just as a human in confinement. Dogs require interaction, affection, play, physical and mental exercise, outlets for energy, etc. Some dogs adapt to the kennel environment quickly and others may adapt in time. Some dogs do not adapt and demonstrate clear signs of distress/anxiety when one of the above “freedoms” is not attained.

The following are key indicators of stress that we watch for in a kennel dog:

* Extended periods of pacing, circling, or constant repetitive movement (such as bounding off kennel walls or licking pen)
* Lack of appetite or weight loss unrelated to any medical condition
* Hyperactivity/Constant overstimulation to the point that the dog is unable to focus even when removed from the kennel environment
* Self-Mutilation: Biting self to the point of injury, licking paws/other parts raw, clawing/chewing at enclosure to the point of bleeding, etc.
* Fear of leaving kennel environment (refusal to walk on a leash or venture out of the kennel)
* Out of character aggression/fear (not previously occurring/occurring over time as dog continues to be kenneled)

We base our decision to euthanize on the above criteria. **The dog must demonstrate several of the above signs of distress for an extended period of time in spite of attempts at alleviation (inside kennel to outside kennel rotation, placing with another animal companion, more time in yard/outside, increased interaction, increased efforts at providing environment that contributes to quality of life) for us to consider euthanasia.** We will also consider euthanizing a dog with medical issues if the issues are causing more pain/discomfort than what we are able to do to alleviate the dog’s suffering. While dog aggression can be a common trait found in Pit Bulls, unprovoked/unpredictable aggression toward humans is not. **We will euthanize a dog we rescue if he/she demonstrates unpredictable aggressive behavior toward humans. We believe it is irresponsible and dangerous to maintain and/or adopt out dogs displaying aggression toward humans.**

We recognize that the majority of the general public continues to believe that euthanasia is cruel. Many people have difficulty with euthanasia because they think like humans, not like dogs. A dog lives in the present moment. A dog does not imagine ahead to a life outside of the shelter or potential adoption. A dog wakes up every day and the reality he/she knows is only the environment he/she is in. To keep a dog in an environment that is chaotic and distressful to them every day without relief is cruel. We believe that, as an organization truly committed to animal welfare, a no-kill policy is not a viable and humane option.

We love our dogs. We have built relationships with our rescues. Though euthanasia is heart-breaking, watching a dog deteriorate physically and mentally day by day is even more heart-breaking. We are personally present when one of our dogs is euthanized. It is not fun. It is painful. Please realize that we attempt to place the needs and lives of the dogs above our own feelings of sadness and pain. Please also realize that we RARELY actually make the decision to euthanize a dog.

If you want further information ask us! We are very open and honest about our position on this issue. We hope that any disagreement on this issue will not interfere with your interest in volunteering with us. We hope that, as you consistently visit the kennel and get to know our dogs, you will see how the kennel life impacts our rescues as we do.

Sincerely,

Saving Grace Founders