



SCVSAR K9 Team Core Proficiency Skills List

The intent is that this document will serve as a guide and points of discussion for peer coaches and their mentees. Depending on the individual goals and aspirations of each team, teams in training may choose to work on some or all the skills listed. The individual skills are not graded or tracked.

The following are recommended core skills that demonstrate the ability of the handler and canine to work safely and effectively as a team in various situations that may occur while deployed.

This also provides teams with information regarding what type of missions are appropriate for their canine. For example, if a canine does not have a strong recall, urban off leash missions may not be appropriate.

Agility Skills

- *Climb & balance on rocks, logs, etc.* – Develop the canine’s ability to safely climb and balance on rocks, a wood pile, or similar uneven terrain with care and confidence.
- *Tunnel* – Develop the canine’s confidence and ability to go through a culvert or tunnel
- *Steep Terrain* – Develop the canine’s ability to climb up a slope with some loose areas such as patches of small rocks or gravel, leaves or loose dirt.
- *Crawl under obstacle (6-18” off ground)* – Develop the canine’s confidence and ability to crawl under an obstacle 6-18” off the ground (depending on the size of the dog) such as a fence, log, bench, etc.
- *Lift over barrier (3-4’ high)* – Determine how the handler will approach lifting the canine over a 3-4’ tall fence or similar barrier with the assistance of another handler. During practice of this exercise, the handlers should aim to maintain control of the canine throughout the exercise and the canine should not show undue anxiety or stress.
- *Lift down from platform* – Without assistance, lift the canine down from a 3-4’ tall platform such as a boulder, truck bed, etc. The handler should be able to maintain control of the canine throughout the exercise and the canine should not show undue anxiety or stress.
- *Walk along an elevated log or plank (8-10’ long, 3’ off the ground)* – Demonstrate the canine’s ability to walk across a log or plank that is 8-10’ long and a minimum of 3’ off the ground. Handlers must spot the dog from both sides of the plank for safety. Ideally, the canine should not be stressed and should display deliberate care when walking on the plank.

Sociability Skills

- *Ride uncrated in a vehicle with one other leashed canines (under handler control) down a bumpy road for 5min* – Demonstrate the canine’s ability to ride with other leashed canines in a moving vehicle over uneven terrain. Canine should not appear to be anxious or stressed.
- *Accept an approaching friendly stranger* – Demonstrate the canine’s ability to accept a friendly stranger that approaches the leashed canine and handler. The stranger and handler should be able to shake hands and converse in an everyday fashion the canine should remain calm and attentive to the handler.
- *Accept an approaching leashed canine with their handler* – Demonstrate the canine’s ability to accept another leashed canine and their handler. The handler and second canine should be able to directly approach and interact (i.e., greet one another, shake hands, and carry on a brief conversation). The handlers shall both maintain full control of their canines at all times.
- *Walk with another person away from the handler for 5 minutes* – Develop the canine’s confidence when escorted away from their handler by another person (about 5 minutes). This is of importance for instances when someone other than the handler needs to hold the canine or put them up in a vehicle.
- *Walk with another person and a second leashed canine for 5 minutes* - Develop the canine’s ability to walk alongside another canine and handler (as if traveling to or from an assigned search area) without becoming overly exuberant.

Obedience Skills

- *Heeling (on-lead for on-lead certifications and off-lead for off-lead certifications)* - Demonstrate the canine’s ability to heel with their handler while executing left, right, and about turns, walking and jogging speeds in straight lines, and a stop. The canine should remain at the handler’s side throughout the exercise and should remain focused on the handler. Positive reinforcement techniques may be used but compulsion (e.g., jerks on a choke chain, harsh verbal corrections, etc.) may not be used.
- *Emergency stop (off-lead certifications only)* - Develop the canine’s ability to immediately stop on command. The handler should be able to place the canine on a “stay” and walk away from the canine at least 25 yards. At the evaluator’s direction, the handler will call the canine using one command. When the canine is half way between their starting point and the handler, the handler should use a command of their choice to stop the dog. The canine may lie down, sit, or stand but must stop on command and wait until they are called a second time. The canine should then come directly to the handler.
- *10 minute wait* – Develop the canine’s ability to be tethered to a fixed object and left out of sight of their handler for 10 minutes. Time begins when the handler is out of sight. At the end of 5 minutes, someone other than the handler will approach and

move the canine to another tether location (also out of sight of the handler) for the remaining 5 minutes. At the completion of the exercise, the handler can return to and reinforce their canine. Ideally, the canine should not show evidence of anxiety so stress (e.g., barking, pulling on lead, etc.) or reactivity toward the helper.

- *5 minute long down* (off-lead certifications only) - Develop the canine's ability to maintain an un-tethered "stay" out of sight of their handler for 5 minutes. Time should begin when the handler is out of sight. If more than one canine is participating in the exercise, each canine will be placed at least 15' from one another. Canines may sit, lay down, stand, or shift positions but may not move more than one body length from their original position. All canines will be under the supervision of a helper throughout the exercise. At the completion of the exercise, the handler can return to and reinforce their canine. The canine should not show evidence of undue anxiety or stress (e.g., barking, pulling on lead, etc.) or reactivity toward any helpers.
- *Recall from 20-25'* – Develop the ability of the canine to perform a recall command while searching. The handler and dog shall be moving through the field and when the dog is moving away from the handler (but not working scent from a subject), the handler shall call the dog and it shall return to the handler. The handler can use multiple commands.
- *Leave an object on command* (i.e. "leave it") – Develop the canine's ability to leave an object immediately on the handler's command. The handler should aim to be able to walk their canine past an object determined to be highly desirable to that canine (e.g., animal droppings, food, toys, etc.) and be able to verbally prevent the canine from making contact with the object (i.e., use a "leave it" command). Physical corrections are not permitted.
- *Directed Send Out* -- Develop the canine's ability to be sent out a minimum of 25 yards, as directly as possible, to an assigned location such as a gully, some bushes, a small hill, or rock pile.

Human Remains Exposure

- Canine exposure to a human remains scent source will allow the handler to note the canine's reaction. Behavior upon exposure to the scent source should be noted in their logs. This is important even for teams not training HRD because teams are often deployed in situations where the subject may have expired. Recognizing how a canine may react will help inform the handler's interpretation of changes in behavior.

For the Harness and Long lead Exposure

- Canine searches along a road while on a long line. There may be times when a dog must be leashed while searching for safety reasons.
- This skill should not be done until the dog is well into its off-lead training.
- Recommend starting with a 15 foot and work up to using a 30 foot. Drill without dog to gain handler confidence and reeling in and out.

- Place the subject out of view of the handler, along and upwind of a 100 yard section of road. In order to simulate a high-traffic area, the dog shall not be allowed to cross the center of the road to the side opposite the subject.

Helicopter Training

***Helo training must be complete before a canine team will be considered for deployment on missions where helos may need to insert or extract teams.*

- *Canine Helicopter training safety lecture* – Attend a canine helicopter safety training lecture prior to participating in any hands-on helicopter training with the canines.
- *Unstable Surface* – Demonstrate the canine’s ability to maintain balance while on an unstable surface
- *Handler/Support loading/unloading* – Demonstrate the ability to safely load and unload from the helicopter including foot & hand placement, packs, communications. Handler must be able to move in motion so that the pilot can maintain stability,
- *Helicopter cold canine loading/unloading* – Demonstrate the ability to safely load and unload the canine from the helicopter while the helicopter is not under power. The handler must maintain full control of the canine at all times, must follow all instructions from the pilot(s), and the canine must not show undue anxiety, stress or reactivity during the exercise.
- *Helicopter hot canine loading/unloading (If Available)* - Demonstrate the ability to safely load and unload the canine from the helicopter while the helicopter is under power and the rotors are turning. The handler must maintain full control of the canine at all times, must follow all instructions from the flight crew, and the canine must not show undue anxiety, stress or reactivity during the exercise.