

PET PEEVES PERIODICAL

A newsletter dedicated to preserving the human-animal bond through behavior counseling.



Appointment Time!

How to make the best out of your visit with a fearful or anxious pet



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When you have a dog or cat that truly despises coming to visit us here at the veterinary clinic, chances are you don't like to schedule that appointment either. I really can't blame our furry companions for not wanting to come see us. Unless they are sick they get to visit once a year and what do we do to them? Poke them with a few needles, maybe trim their nails, and put them on a hard table? That doesn't sound like very much fun to me! There are some things that we can do to help their veterinary experience at least become a bit more tolerable.

For our patients that don't like to visit, I like to recommend socialization visits to their owners. These visits are just fun visits where no pokes are involved. We will do different activities depending on how nervous your dog is when he comes. Some dogs get nervous in the parking lot. If this is the case, the parking lot is where I recommend starting. A member of our staff will come out to the parking lot to feed your dog treats, and we will continue to do this for as many times as necessary until we can get them in the building without them being scared. Once your dog gets into the building we can weigh them if they aren't too scared, otherwise we will take that slowly, too. We use lots of treats during this training process, so make sure your dog is hungry when coming. The goal is to eventually have them go into the exam room willingly. No handling or pokes required. Just a nice visit in the exam room with many treats given. Handling exercises will be performed later on to get them used to restraint. These training exercises can go very quickly with some dogs, and others will require lifelong socialization visits periodically throughout the year. It just depends on how the dog reacts.

So what do we try to do to ease a cat's anxiety level? Cats are very difficult because for the most part they don't go on casual car rides with their owner. So when they get into the car, they KNOW what's coming is not going to be fun. A lot of the training needs to start at home getting the cat used to the carrier. In most cases the carrier only comes out at home on days the cat gets to come visit us. So what happens? Out comes carrier, there goes cat. If you're lucky enough to find where your cat decided to hide this time, you drag the cat out (hopefully not getting bit or scratched in the process) and shove him into a box. Once in the box he gets to go on a car ride, where he gets carsick, and then gets to get pulled out of the box and poked with some sharp needles. Back into box and car, and back home. It's a wonder cats don't want to come see us. If you can at least get the cat used to the carrier at home, that can cut down on some of the cat's anxiety. Leaving the carrier out at all times, giving treats to the cat when they go in it on their own, feeding meals near the carrier, and having play time around the carrier are all things that can be done to help make the carrier a better experience. Eventually, when they walk into it on their own you can shut the door for short periods of time, and open it right away so they can come out on their own. Many cats will enjoy relaxing time in their carrier when it is left out at all times!

Things that can be done at the veterinary clinic to reduce the stress and anxiety without doing these socialization visits include, decreasing any stimulation (lower lighting if possible, schedule appointment during quiet times), avoid any petting unless the animal is receptive to it, try to provide low stress restraint/handling when it can be safely done for both owners and the doctor/technician, and go slowly, providing breaks when necessary. Sometimes

In this issue:

Appointment Time	1
Did You Know?	2

RESOURCES

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Appointment Time (cont.)

requesting a longer appointment time for fearful or anxious dogs and cats will give us the chance to not rush through an appointment. For dogs, sometimes it is better to remove leashes and choke collars and to keep large dogs on the floor. For cats, weighing them in their carriers and covering the cat with a towel can help decrease their fear.

When it comes down to it, sometimes we just have to pick our battles. That may mean just getting the necessary vaccines done, and not giving them that nail trim you were desperately hoping they would get. That may be for another day! I have seen very good progress in dogs that have come in for socialization visits and highly recommend them. It gives the staff a chance to not be the "bad guy"! Ideally, it would be nice to do daily visits for 5-10 minutes. That usually is not practical. I have seen good results doing weekly visits. It depends on how quickly you want to see results. The more we get to see your pet for "fun" visits, the quicker they will enjoy coming to see us too! And remember, bring them hungry!!



DID YOU KNOW?

- Not only does spaying or neutering your pet decrease many medical complications that can arise, it can also reduce some problem behaviors. Behaviors like roaming, marking, mounting, and some forms of aggression can be significantly reduced. If performed at an early age, it may prevent these problems from even occurring.

This concludes my fourth year of writing *Pet Peeves Periodical*. I hope you have enjoyed reading the articles as much as I have enjoyed putting them together. I am hoping to continue to do this for as long as I have subject matter to write about, so please give me any suggestions for future topics. All previous *Pet Peeves Periodicals* can be found on our website at www.janesvillevet.com.

Amanda