

Lecture notes – dog behaviour

Please note that ILOs and success criteria for this topic are in separate document

[Video DB1 – Senses and body language](#)

Animal behaviour

Animal behavior includes all the ways animals interact with other organisms and the physical environment. It is always influenced by the animal's emotional state – what's going on inside is reflected on the outside. The context of behaviour is also vital – an animal licking its lips just after finishing eating is in a completely different frame of mind than an animal licking its lips as it enters a vet clinic.

By learning to understand behaviour and educating our clients to identify how an animal is feeling and how to manage certain behaviours, we can make a significant contribution to the **human-animal bond**.

Poor understanding of animal behaviour can result in vets contributing to the development of behavioural issues through poor experiences in clinics.

Dogs' sense of smell has a very important impact on how they perceive the world

A dog's sense of smell 10,000-100,000 times stronger than humans (it does vary with breed – scent hounds such as Bloodhounds and Beagles have particularly strong senses of smell).

In addition to the main olfactory system, the dog has an accessory olfactory system which contributes significantly to the sense of smell. The vomeronasal organ is a patch of sensory cells within the main nasal chamber and detects moisture-borne odour particles known as pheromones. Pheromones are a secreted or excreted chemical factor that triggers a social response in members of the same species. They are capable of acting like hormones outside the body of the secreting individual, to impact the behaviour of the receiving individuals.

The scents from pheromones are handled differently from other environmental smells – they go to the amygdala within the brain, which is responsible for instinctive emotions e.g. fear, sexual urges (you don't need to know details of brain anatomy – just know pheromones are handled by different areas within the brain than other smells). This also helps explain why preparations of calming pheromones such as Adaptil® can be useful.

Pheromones are mainly secreted from urine and anal glands, which explains why dogs greeting each other sniff bottoms and why dogs frequently urinate on bushes they may just have sniffed.

Dog body language

Dogs primarily communicate with each other and with humans through body language.

Need to understand what body language a stressed dog is likely to show.

Anatomy	Relaxed	Stressed
Face	Soft, loose mouth	Skin taut; wrinkled brow; lips pulled back
Eyes	Almond shape; normal pupils; soft eye	Dilated pupils; hard eye; whale eye
Ears	Soft, loose; forward or midway on heads	Far forward; out to the side; flat against head
Spine/ Posture	Flexible neck to tail	Rigid
Tail*	Level with topline; slightly above or below; wagging	High above topline; tucked; wagging
Mouth	Mouth open; lips-long, soft	Mouth closed; lips-short, tense; snarl; lip lift; bite

*Curly, docked tail - evaluate in light of what is typical for that breed

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The ladder of aggression was developed by Kendal Shepherd. Dogs may progress to overt aggression within seconds during a single episode if the perceived threat occurs quickly and at close quarters, or learn to dispense with lower rungs on the ladder over time, if repeated efforts to appease are misunderstood and responded to inappropriately. It has been noted smaller dogs often go up these steps more quickly because they have learnt that other signs, which are perhaps taken more seriously in larger dogs, may be ignored.

Anxiety may be demonstrated through displacement behaviours - normal **behaviors** displayed out of context which indicate conflict and anxiety. The dog wants to do something, but he/she is suppressing the urge to do it. Common displacement behaviours include lip licking, yawning and panting. These constitute fidgeting in the four Fs.

This video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4CQoPPYmveQ> shows some anxiety/displacement behaviours.

Appeasement behaviour is common in dogs trying to de-escalate a stressful situation. Can occur between dogs or between dogs and humans. Appeasement – actions by one non-human animal that reduces the likelihood of attack or threatening behaviour from another by taking a submissive posture, reducing apparent body size, yawning, lip licking or using vocal signals. Dogs use these when they are stressed or fearful.

Fearful behaviour indicates a dog should not be handled unless it is completely necessary and, in the case that it must be handled, extreme care must be taken and fear minimisation techniques used.

Tail wagging – wagging indicates a willingness to interact rather than happiness. A gentle side-to-side wag usually suggests the dog is calm. An erect, rigid wag suggests they are aroused/stressed

Tails video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZFq1Jk0w2EM>

Video DB2 – Preventing development of behavioural problems – puppies

Two common reasons for development of behavioural problems is learning through negative experiences e.g. having surgery at a vet clinic or anxiety of the unfamiliar due to lack of previous experience.

Prevention of behavioural problems focuses on three main aspects: selection of an appropriate pet, socialisation and stimulation.

1. **Selection of an appropriate pet** for the owner's circumstances and wishes. Factors such as the physical and personality characteristics of various breeds, owner lifestyle, owner expectations, and personal preferences influence the decision about which pet will suit a particular owner. Details of process are outside the scope of this subject. More information is available in Marbury and Duxbury's article (not examinable).
2. **Socialisation.** The critical socialisation period for puppies is 3 weeks until up to approximately 12 weeks of age (opinions vary on the exact time period). During this time the pup will be interested in exploring anything new. A positive experience in this period will increase the likelihood that they will not become fearful in similar situations in the future. This is why the main focus of a 12 week vaccination consult is making sure the puppy enjoys the experience. Free food works for most puppies as well as most people, so use it liberally, especially as soon as a procedure has finished.

Many vet clinics offer Puppy Preschool which offers social experiences in a controlled environment for puppies and education of owners. about dog body language, basic training techniques including teaching the puppy to be calm and other important behavioural and health aspects of owning a puppy. More details about Puppy Preschool are available in the case study and in Kersti Seksel's article 'Preventing Behaviour Problems in Puppies and Kittens'. A checklist of people, situations and objects to socialise puppies to is also provided in the readings. You do not need to learn the items on the list.

The main aims of puppy pre-school are:

Socialize the puppy so that it develops into an obedient and enjoyable pet.

Teach basic commands such as come, sit, stay, and heel using positive reinforcement.

Ensure that visits to the veterinary clinic are an enjoyable experience for both the dog and the owner.

Teach owners about the normal behavior of dogs and how to recognize potential behavior problems.

Educate owners on other aspects of pet care such as nutrition, dentistry, bathing, grooming, and microchipping that may not be adequately covered in an average consultation.

If Puppy Preschool is not an option, non-procedure visits can allow more time for a puppy to have a positive experience in a clinic and for the owner to receive behavioural guidance where required.

Socialisation to children

It is particularly important to socialise puppies to children as several studies have shown that children make up the majority of dog bite victims and in the majority of those cases the dogs were known to the victim and over half were provoked by behaviour such as the child playing with or petting the dog too aggressively. Educating parents to recognise warnings through body language and providing a safe spot for the dog which the child can't access could both reduce the injury rate.

Supervision of child/puppy interactions is key. The child must be shown how to behave around the puppy and the puppy chooses whether to approach and can back away if it wants to.

More information: <https://vcahospitals.com/know-your-pet/dog-behavior-problems-aggression-children>

Learning to be alone

Dogs are a social species and like to be around familiar people and animals. Many puppies will never have been alone (moved from mother to new home, where owners often try to be home for the early days) and are very distressed to suddenly find no-one there. A gradual approach can help them adjust.

Train the puppy to sit and stay in the area it will be left using food rewards

Move away a few metres initially, gradually increasing the distance and time, each time giving a time-consuming treat.

Crates

Create a safe space for a puppy/adult dog and a place for short periods of confinement when required.

Should never be used for punishment or for long term confinement.

Video DB3 –Behavioural husbandry

Behavioural husbandry includes actions that owners can take to maximise the chances of their animal having good psychological wellbeing and behaviour i.e. essentially an adult version of prevention/minimisation of problem.

1) Adequate physical exercise

Requirements vary a lot with age, breed and health status (0-2 hours/day)

Walks are the most common way of exercising dogs. They have the added advantage of enrichment through sniffing, exploring bushes, meeting and socialising with other dogs, playing fetch or other games.

Off-leash time is very important – there is evidence of more behavioural issues in dogs that don't get

off-leash exercise.

The walk must prioritise the needs/desires of the dog rather than the owner where possible

Duration/frequency of walks affected by:

- Owner time availability
- Behavioural issues while walking – pulling, overreaction to other dogs, reliability of recall i.e. issues that can relate to lack of timely socialisation earlier in life

Running dog while owner runs or cycles gives great cardiovascular fitness but less enrichment overall.

Exercise and housing

Dogs will rarely exercise themselves in their own yard even when there is space to do it. A large dog can live in a small area if they get enough exercise

Inadequate exercise can lead to overactivity and poor manners e.g. jumping up

2) Adequate resources

Resources and their security are important to dogs as in the wild there was not always enough to go around. Resources can be tangible, such as food and water, or intangible e.g. fun, comfort, stimulation. Dogs find different resources more important than other dogs and value different resources at different times

Providing enough of the desired resources at the desired time, particularly with physical objects in multi-dog households, can help.

Inadequate resources can lead to issues such as food or toy guarding.

3) Social requirements

Dogs are a social, pack species by nature and have been domesticated over thousands of years to be familiar with humans, so it is not surprising that they like to have as much time as possible socialising with a mix of dogs and humans.

Minimum requirement of 30 mins per day with company for dogs in lab settings and also recommended for owned animals. Dogs vary with how much they like to socialise.

The amount of time a dog spends fulfilling its social requirements depends on factors such as:

- owner time
- where the dog normally lives when the owner is at home i.e. inside vs outside. Housing area in turn is affected by inherent factors e.g. coat type (shedding dogs may be a problem for some) and factors which the owner/vet can influence e.g. behaviour.

Inadequate social opportunity can result in behaviours such as fear from social inexperience or over-reacting when has chance for social interaction.

4) Positive experiences (social)

This can include:

- Meeting new dogs/people

- Playing with dog and human friends
- Positive training
- Companionship

Affected by:

- temperament (how much the dog enjoys interacting),
- age of the dog (younger dogs often want to interact with any dog it meets whereas older dogs tend to be less interested),
- manners of the dog (polite dogs will have more positive interactions on the whole)
- time of owner

Positive experiences (non-social)

This includes most types of enrichment e.g. foraging toys (e.g. Kong), bones, chew toys, access to a new area to explore

Behavioural husbandry in a veterinary consult

Vets can be very focused on the physiological aspects of disease and its treatment and not adequately consider the psychological impacts the situation may have on the patient.

There are some actions we can take in consults that can make everything a little easier for our patients and by extension, also for us as vets. Fear-free of course has a lot of excellent ways we can decrease patient stress, and these are some complementary ones.

Include social details on records e.g. type of accommodation e.g. house vs apartment, typical exercise amount and type, family members, whether attended puppy classes, other training done etc. This should be in addition to emotional notes as per module 4 of Fear-free as it covers different but important information.

Ideally allow all dogs, even very small ones, to walk into the consult room rather than be carried. This increases the dog's behaviour options rather than coercing them. Ask the owner to enter first and the dog may follow so as to remain with the owner. Staff can help by standing behind the dog so moving into the consult seems like a safer option. Can also leave some food on the floor to help.

Offer every dog food as it enters the consult room if appropriate. As well as potentially making the dog happy, it also can very quickly give you an idea of how the dog may behave during the consult. If the dog doesn't eat, it means that it has other concerns at the time e.g. looking for a way out of the situation or feeling nauseous.

Consider examining dogs with FAS outside.

Notice and reward good behaviour – we don't often reward a dog for just sitting or standing quietly in the consult room while we talk to the owner, and this should happen more often.

Be aware of saying good boy/girl as you do a procedure such as this is often used in training as a release command, where the dog has completed the requested task and can relax. If the dog is familiar with voice commands, it can be better to say 'good sit' to encourage the patient to remain while you finish the task, then good boy/girl once the procedure is complete

Do the least pleasant procedure last and ideally near an exit point. If the dog sees it will be able to leave through a nearby exit, it will feel more positive than on the table or in a corner.