

Video CD1 - Introductions

Brief notes will be made available after you have had a chance to attempt the learning activities.

Video CD2 –Managing undesired behaviour

Range of undesirable behaviours

- Normal (especially for young animals) but annoying e.g. dog does not sit. Relatively easy to manage with basic training using operant conditioning i.e. teaching the dog a new way to respond to an instruction. Need to manage owner expectations – a young dog that has been home alone all day is going to find it hard to contain the excitement of the owner coming home and may show inappropriate behaviours. In cats, these behaviours are quite often related to situations where they are not given the opportunity to express their natural behaviours.
- Non-pathologic behaviours which significantly impact the owners e.g. barking excessively at strangers passing. Require strategies such as environmental modification and conditioning but can usually be managed successfully.
- Fear/anxiety problems e.g. fear-based aggression. These are much more complex due to emotional (i.e. unconscious) response
 - Modify behaviour using classical conditioning
 - Modify physical environment
 - Medication

For more complicated cases, underlying medical causes must be ruled out.

To understand modification of any behaviour, it is vital to first understand how animals learn, both consciously and unconsciously.

- **Operant conditioning** involves a conscious decision to act, although the response may be delayed. Reward will increase the frequency of a behaviour and 'punishment' will decrease it. There are two types of punishment – positive and negative. In positive punishment, the dog's behaviour makes something bad happen e.g. the dog jumps up at the owner and is kicked away. The pain from the kick makes the dog less likely to jump up again. Positive punishment is NOT recommended as the dog may become fearful of the owner. In negative punishment, the dog's behaviour causes something good to be taken away e.g. the dog jumps up at the owner and the owner turns their back. The pain loss of attention makes the dog less likely to jump up again. Processed in the cerebral cortex and hippocampus which are involved in learning and memory. This is used predominantly for managing normal or non-pathologic behaviour problems.
- **Classical conditioning** involves unconscious learning through pairing of stimuli which is processed in the part of the brain known as the amygdala (involved in emotional responses). The conditioned stimulus elicits an emotional state e.g. anxiety, fear, sexual behaviours and responses elicited are mostly autonomic (adrenaline, pupil size, heart rate, salivation) and cannot be delayed, rewarded or punished.

Desensitisation - classical 'unconditioning'

Desensitization is the gradual exposure to situations or stimuli that would bring on the undesirable behavior, but at a level so low that there is no negative response. This is done by very gradual exposure to the negative stimulus (the scary thing), starting at a very low level and building up very slowly. At every increase in intensity of the stimulus, the dog needs to be happy and comfortable. Going too fast may frighten the dog, resulting in sensitisation instead of desensitization.

Complete desensitisation produces behavioural extinction.

Counter-conditioning

This is used to change the pet's emotional response, feelings or attitude toward a stimulus. It pairs the presence of the negative stimulus (the scary thing) with a favourite reward to change the animal's emotional state.

Desensitisation and counter-conditioning are often used in combination.

Environmental modification

This aims to separate the animal from the stimulus or change the environment in which the stimulus occurs to prevent or decrease the problem. These types of manipulations will not "fix" the patient, but they can prevent or decrease the occurrence of behaviors that are most distressing to the clients and pets. These solutions can work quite well for cats e.g. adding a baby gate

Medication

Medications can be useful in reducing fear and anxiety, which improves welfare and increases the chances of desensitisation and counter-conditioning being successful. Specific medication for behavioural problems is beyond the scope of this course.

Seeking extra help

Veterinary behaviourists

These are veterinarians who have completed either membership (1 year of training) or fellowship (3 years of training) in addition to veterinary degree. Only those who have fellowships are allowed to register as specialists (applies to all specialties).

Behaviourists can identify underlying medical conditions which impact behaviour, educate owners on management, undertake all types of conditioning and prescribe appropriate medication.

Trainers

Trainers do not have registration or compulsory qualifications and their quality varies.

Some trainers are excellent – follow best practice, refer to veterinary behaviourist as required (and behaviourist may refer to them in appropriate cases as trainers cannot dispense medication).

Most are good in operantly conditional training and many use positive reinforcement i.e. rewarding good behaviour with treats.

Rehoming or euthanasia

Rehoming is attempted in many cases as evidenced by shelter statistics (although doesn't indicate whether treatment was attempted).

It can be successful where a specific environment in the previous home was a negative stimulus.

New owners will need to be made aware of previous issues.

If the animal has poor welfare or is a risk to humans or other animals, euthanasia may be needed and be the best outcome for the circumstances.