

## Getting Consent at the Vet: How to Transfer Cooperative Care Training

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Cooperative care, also known as consent-based care, emphasizes the importance of an animal's participation and emotional well-being during veterinary procedures. By incorporating principles of behaviour science and compassionate handling, distraction techniques as well as trained behaviours, veterinary professionals can transform the patient's experience, reduce fear and anxiety, and improve safety and efficiency in the clinic.

### Benefits of Cooperative Veterinary Care

- Promotes safety and relaxation: When patients are familiar with what to expect and are given choices, their physiological stress response is reduced.
- Encourages participation and autonomy: Allowing the animal to opt in or out builds trust and reduces resistance.
- Reduces stress for all involved: Guardians feel empowered, veterinary team members can work more efficiently, and injuries are reduced.
- Improves outcomes and relationships: Cooperative care fosters a more positive association with the veterinary clinic, making future visits easier.
- Job satisfaction and financial gain for trainers and veterinary professionals

### Providing Resources

To bridge the gap between training done in-home and clinical procedures, trainers and guardians should provide the veterinary team with:

- Clear summaries of trained behaviours (e.g., stationing, chin rest)
- Defined learned behaviours and corresponding stop behaviours
- Notes on sensitive areas (e.g., tail, feet, ears) and what body parts can be handled comfortably
- Muzzle training status or conditioning for any other safety tools
- Any cue words or predictor cues that help prepare the patient
- A brief overview of goals achieved and what still needs to be worked on
- Video resources can be invaluable for veterinary team members

\*\* If a relationship with the veterinary team is established prior to training commencing, it can be helpful for trainers to know the skill level of the veterinary team members that will be involved to help tailor training to the pet, client and the veterinary team\*\*

### Communication & Alerts

Cooperative care alerts should be visibly noted in patient records and treatment plans. These alerts can guide the veterinary professional(s) on how to approach the patient and what signs indicate the need to pause or adjust the approach.

### Meet & Greet Sessions

- Introduce the animal to the clinic environment **without training**.
- Guardians should plan to pay for brief sessions of 10–15 minutes with a veterinary team member for these introductions.
- Use these sessions to determine the ideal exam room setup, handling preferences, and comfort strategies.
- “Happy visits” can be done separately by guardians to maintain a positive emotional response to the clinic.

### Proximity

- Encourage interactions at the patient’s pace.
- Have veterinary team members reinforce close proximity by tossing treats to the patient and reinforcing as the patient gets closer.
- Respect the animal’s choice to opt in or opt out.
- Avoid forcing interactions; look for relaxed body language before continuing.

### Follow-Up Sessions: Generalizing Care

- Practice learned behaviours in the veterinary clinic while the veterinary professional observes.
- Gradually adding a team member to the training.
- When the patient appears ready, the vet team member can be included in the training and start touch/handling etc. the patient. Ideally these sessions occur by breaking training into small approximations for both the vet team member and patient to be successful.

### Let Clients Lead

Clients who have spent time training their pets are key partners in the veterinary process. They can help or explain the training protocol as well as the needs of their pet. This teamwork leads to smoother appointments and fewer stress responses.

Trainers and/or guardians should encourage the veterinary team to come up with an emergency plan for cooperative care patients. These plans can often prevent stress for patients, clients, and the veterinary team. Having a plan can also protect the training that has previously been done.

- What type of restraint is best tolerated and by whom?
- Which medications (PVPs, sedation) are appropriate, or could be? Letting emergency teams know if PVPs are warranted for regular veterinary visits can encourage their use for emergencies.
- Can the patient be safely hospitalized, or do they need special considerations?
- Should guardians stay for sedation?
- Should the patient go home early?
- What implementation is recommended for hospitalization? Visual barriers/calming music/safety tools etc.
- Which veterinary professional is the patient most comfortable with? (This would be for an emergency within the patients regular practice.)

Cooperative care training improves patient outcomes and strengthens veterinary-client relationships. It is important to have clear communication and understand not only the needs of the patient but that of the client and the veterinary team.

### Resources

Cooperative Veterinary Care by Monique Feyrecilde

Canine and Feline Behavior for Veterinary Technicians and Nurses by Debbie Martin and Julie Shaw

Low Stress Handling, Restraint and Behavior Modification of Dogs and Cats by Christine Calder and Pat Koven

Constructing Canine Consent: Conceptualising and adopting a consent-focused relationship with dogs by Erin Jones

### References

Feyrecilde, M. (2024). *Cooperative veterinary care*. Wiley Blackwell.

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