



SHILOH
VETERINARY HOSPITAL

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP YOUR DOG HAVE A FEAR FREE EXPERIENCE?

A LOT!

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We like to promote the idea of providing a fear-free experience for dogs visiting our hospital and also believe that all dogs deserve to be free from fear and anxiety every day throughout their lives! Some great ways to achieve this include:

- Providing daily mental enrichment, exercise and play time
- Ensuring dogs have ample opportunities to eliminate and are not 'home alone' or crated for too many hours
- Teaching new behaviors with reward-based training
- Avoiding any type of discipline or corrections, including a stern voice
- Avoiding the use of punishment tools such as choke chains, prong collars and shock collars
- Learning to read your dog's body language so you can understand how he or she is feeling (*follow this link for a great article to get you started: <http://en.turid-rugaas.no/who-is-turid-rugaas.html>*)

Preparing and Traveling to Our Hospital

- Prepare at least one type of soft treat that your dog absolutely loves to bring with you to the hospital.
- Spray the car and any bedding you will have in the car for your dog with Adaptil Canine Pheromone at least fifteen minutes prior to entering your car. You can also spray the clothes you're wearing since you will be with your dog in the hospital. For continuous pheromone therapy, your dog can wear an Adaptil collar.

- Dress your dog with a comfortable flat nylon or leather collar. Choke chains, prong collars and shock collars are uncomfortable and will definitely cause stress in dogs. The use of shock collars is prohibited on hospital property.
- Please use a standard leash for your dog and do not bring a retractable leash so she stays safely near you.
- If your dog gets carsick, please ask one of our veterinarians what you can give him prior to traveling to prevent motion sickness. Dogs who feel nauseous in a moving vehicle do not always vomit. Additional signs to look for include: drooling, whining, yawning, panting, listlessness and anxiousness or inability to settle. They are often hesitant or afraid to get in a vehicle in the first place since they associate it with feeling sick. If you see any of these signs, it's important to talk to your veterinarian and together decide the best plan to prevent them.
- If your dog is hesitant or afraid to get into a vehicle, it could be because she associates the car with feeling sick. Pain and discomfort are additional reasons, in which case she may need you to lift her into the vehicle or provide a ramp for her to enter on her own.
- It's a great idea for your dog to wear a seatbelt while traveling for her safety and yours. The stability of a seatbelt harness can also potentially prevent motion sickness. If you decide to use one, please introduce it to your dog gradually using lots of 'high value' food rewards.
- Play calming music in the vehicle and speak softly to your dog in the car.

Arrival at Shiloh Veterinary Hospital

- Please plan to arrive early enough to give your dog a potty break in our yard. Even if he just relieved himself at home, being able to sniff new surroundings can be a stress reliever for dogs.
- Have some treats in your pocket to start offering your dog when you enter the building.
- When entering the building, make sure the doors do not close on your dog's feet or tail and keep the leash loose.
- Check in at the front desk and feel free to take some treats from the counter for your dog. Choose a seat in the waiting area that is not close to other dogs. Being close to other dogs can be stressful for your dog so it's best to avoid them if possible.
- While waiting to go into an exam room, speak to your dog with a calm, reassuring voice.
- If your dog wants physical attention, slowly massage him rather than patting or stroking quickly.
- Many dogs try to jump on their people in the waiting room. This is often misunderstood as unruly or 'bad' behavior, but the dog is likely nervous and is asking for reassurance. Many owners discipline their dogs for this but what they really need is kindness.
- While in the waiting area or exam room, practice fun behaviors that your dog knows and reward with treats or just offer free treats if she doesn't feel like doing tricks.
- Ask the front desk staff for help if your dog is stressed. Some dogs are happier waiting in their vehicle, walking outside, or relaxing in a quiet room. We are happy to accommodate the needs of each patient as best we can.

- Request a pheromone-sprayed bandana for your dog to wear. We have them at the front desk of both hospitals.
- A veterinary hospital is not an ideal place for your dog to meet new canine friends. Other dogs in the waiting area could be sick, injured, or very scared and not in the right frame of mind to greet strangers. Your dog may also be more afraid than you realize, so it's best to completely avoid other dogs.
- If another adult or a child asks to greet your dog, be his advocate if he's worried about strangers and explain that he doesn't enjoy meeting new people when he's stressed.
- If your dog struggles on slippery floors, ask a front desk employee for an anti-slip mat for your dog to lie or stand on in the waiting room, or feel free to bring your own mat.
- Although disciplining may seem necessary when dogs are barking, jumping, or lunging at other people or dogs, it is actually the worst thing you can do. All of these behaviors could be caused by frustration, anxiety, or simply excitement if a sociable dog wants to greet a person or dog and there is no good reason for verbal or physical corrections (punishments). They will cause or increase anxiety and make matters worse. Instead, it's best to calmly redirect your dog's attention or feel free to step outside if she needs more space. The front desk staff is happy to help find a solution to make your dog more comfortable.

In the Exam Room

- Upon entering the room, please turn the door handle to close the door quietly behind you.
- In most cases, it's a good idea to unhook the leash and allow your dog to sniff the exam room to become acclimated.
- We like to weigh our canine patients and prefer that they step on the scale themselves whenever possible. This may take a few extra minutes of coaxing with treats but it's well worth the time! Forcing a dog onto a scale when he's unwilling to step up himself will cause a fearful association with the scale, which will likely increase with each visit.
- If your dog is not cooperating with the technician or doctor, it is very important that you remain calm and supportive of your dog and resist any temptation to speak sternly, grab, or physically discipline him or her. Dogs who are uncooperative are often thought of as 'being bad,' but they are actually scared, and possibly terrified.
- Dogs feel more stable and supported if you hold them gently with both hands. Holding their collar can be aversive to many dogs and cause fear. They can also still jump or fall off the table while you're holding the collar so it's much safer to hold on to their bodies.
- If your dog is fearful while in the hospital, your veterinarian may recommend an anti-anxiety or sedative medication to help her have a better experience. You can help your dog by following the recommendations and striving to make sure that all future visits are Fear Free!

Returning Home

When mammals experience a stressful event, cortisol is released from the brain. Cortisol can remain in the body for one to three days following a stressful situation, potentially causing them to be more reactive to triggers during that time. If your dog is intolerant of interactions with human and animal family members after a veterinary visit, it may be due to cortisol. Please contact us if your dog is exhibiting unusual behavior one to two days after a veterinary visit.

We love to share ideas about how to help our animal friends be happy, relaxed and free of fear! Feel free to ask us for any suggestions we may have for your special canine friend!