

ANIMAL HANDLING AND RESTRAINT

Animal Handling Skills-Professionalism and Safety

- The public watches us to learn how to properly handle animals.
- Being professional means being SAFE and HUMANE.
- Good animal handling skills prevent staff from being injured.
- Good animal handling skills reduce stress for the animal.

Examples of Safe Animal Handling:

- Be aware of the special stressors for animals in the clinic setting.
 - The animal may be injured or ill.
 - The clinic is extremely chaotic for any animal-there are an incredible number of smells and other stimuli in the clinic, and animals are likely to be confused and distressed.
 - Many of our patients have lived entirely outdoors and have not been handled or examined before.
- Never put your face directly into the face of a dog or cat.
- Do not come up behind or crowd around a dog.
- Do not poke at animals in cages.
- Concentrate on the animal you are handling without being distracted by other activities around you.

Safe and effective animal handling requires a thorough understanding of the normal behavior and responses of each species. Below is some general information on animal behavior and handling techniques. There is no substitute, however, for careful observation and experience.

If you are uncomfortable handling any animal-ASK FOR ASSISTANCE. There are no extra points for being a 'hero'. The safety of our staff and patients is most important!

Staff Communication

Any animal exhibiting potentially aggressive behavior should have a kennel sign (CAUTION) posted to alert others who may be handling the animal. Specific alerts or recommendations should be written on the sign to provide staff with as much information as possible when handling the animal.

Restraint or Control

The first rule to keep in mind when handling any kind of animal is that the least restraint is often the best restraint. This does not mean that you give up your control, just that you use as little restraint as necessary while maintaining control of the situation. Every animal and every situation is different so there are no hard and fast rules as to what method works best in which situation.

Factors that may influence your decision on which method to use are:

- Your personal safety
- The safety of the animal
- The safety of others in the vicinity
- The amount of time that you can spend in the process.

You should start by using the least amount of restraint possible while maintaining effective control over the animal. The situation may call for you to gradually escalate the degree of restraint.

TYPES OF RESTRAINT

Before attempting to restrain an animal you should take a moment to allow the animal to become comfortable with you:

- Crouch down so that you are on their level
- Avoid direct eye contact but maintain safe visual contact with the animal
- Talk in soothing tones. Avoid high-pitched, excited talk.
- Try patting your leg or the ground, motioning the animal towards you.

VERBAL RESTRAINT:

Many dogs know some commands or can at least recognize authority, even if the command is unfamiliar. Commands such as SIT, STAY, COME, DOWN, NO or even HEEL may be useful tools to encourage a dog to cooperate. Also, soft quiet words can calm a frightened animal. Yelling or screaming should never be used as it can cause the animal to become more fearful or aggressive.

PHYSICAL RESTRAINT: TOOLS AND EQUIPMENT

Leash: The most common tool used to handle animals in the clinic is the leash. Placed around a dog's neck it normally controls even the largest dog. In the event a dog refuses to cooperate with a leash – carry him. Some dogs have never seen a leash and will freeze up to the sensation around a sensitive area like the neck. Leashes can be abused; never drag or strangle an animal with a leash; if the animal starts to struggle, pulling and jerking away from you, she is probably not leash trained. Pause and let the dog calm down and try again after reassuring her. Sometimes a quick tug on the leash will encourage a fearful dog to walk. If the dog refuses to walk, apply a muzzle (if necessary) and carry her.

When handling cats, a leash should be used as a back-up in the event the cat should become frightened and resist restraint. Loop the lead over the cat's head and under one front leg. This will prevent the cat from escaping should she get loose from your restraint. Always loop the lead under a front limb-cats can be seriously injured or even killed by an inappropriately placed leash.

Every animal being transported or handled in the clinic must ALWAYS wear a leash. It is too easy for a frightened animal to get loose and escape.

Your hand: Touching an animal is also an effective form of restraint. Your hands are sensitive to the amount of pressure that is being exerted on the animal and can be quickly modified to the situation. Hands can be used to gently stroke a dog or to firmly grasp a struggling cat. Although hands can be the most versatile, they are also the most vulnerable to injury. Recognizing when they would not be effective is very important.

Towels: A towel or blanket is a very useful tool for cats and small dogs. A towel can be used to decrease an animal's arousal by covering the head and body and can help protect from sharp claws.

Come-a-long or control pole: The control pole is used to safely handle aggressive animals. Used appropriately it is an effective tool. Inappropriate or unskilled use can cause serious injury to the animal. The control pole may further distress an upset animal and should only be used when the handler or other's safety is genuinely threatened. Volunteers are NOT to use the control pole unassisted. If an animal is aggressive enough to warrant the use of a control pole-ASK FOR ASSISTANCE from an experienced veterinarian or technician.

Nets: The net is the primary tool used to handle fractious cats or wildlife. It allows for the safe handling and transfer of even the most aggressive small mammal.

Muzzles: Muzzles are used when a snappy dog must be handled. There are nylon muzzles and plastic basket available. A leash or strip of rolled gauze can be used as a temporary muzzle. Because dogs often try to remove a muzzle, it is important that the muzzle be placed securely. A weak or poorly made muzzle may lead to a false sense of security and the possibility of being bitten.

Muzzles designed for cats extend up to cover the eyes, reducing visual stimulation. For some cats these can be very useful for calming the animal and helping to protect the handler from injury,

Drugs: For animals who are too aggressive or stressed to handle safely for procedures, sedation and/or general anesthesia may be necessary to allow treatment. If you are unable to handle an animal, notify a veterinarian to determine whether sedation is appropriate.

Credo: Never Let Go.

The place where correct use of restraint is the most critical is when two people are handling the animal. This could be to perform a physical exam, administer anesthetic or to give medications. The "holder" is the person whose job it is to restrain the animal in such a way that the procedure can be accomplished with the least amount of stress to both handlers and animal. The specific amount of restraint used to control the animal is the key to safety for the handlers and comfort for the animal. Too much restraint can cause the animal to fight back, too little restraint can result in the handler or injector being hurt or in the animal escaping.

CANINE COMMUNICATION-EVALUATING AN ANIMAL QUICKLY

Canine communication is more than 90% non-verbal. If you wait until you hear a dog bark or growl it may be too late to respond. Here are some tips on evaluating a dog's body language.

The Tail should be the first area of the body you check.

Position:

Tail high-The dog is alert, focused and confident. This is generally a good sign; as this is a dog will usually act predictably. However, other signs should be evaluated for a clearer picture of the dog's state of mind.

Tail out behind the body-This display suggests that a dog is comfortable although there may be some unease about the situation. A dog with his tail out behind her is still likely to act predictably. Observe other factors to decide the best approach with this dog.

Tail low or tucked under body-This display shows submission and/or fear. This can be the most dangerous dog to handle as fear may cause her to react unpredictably to any stimulus. Slow and reassuring actions around this dog are a must.

Movement

Rapid wagging- This signals excitement or strong curiosity. It is generally associated with friendly behavior, but caution should always be exercised around any unknown animal.

Slow wagging-This generally indicates confusion or lack of confidence. Depending on other attributes, it could signal a desire to be friends or a wish to get away. Use caution while reassuring the dog that you are friendly.

Tail held still-Use extreme caution. This may mean nothing more than the dog is concentrating so hard on what's going on that she's forgotten her tail. Or, it could signify that she has made up her mind and is ready to act. If the tail is held still, carefully assess all other factors before approaching too closely.

The Ears

Ears erect or forward-This shows confidence and alertness in the part of the dog. Combined with a high, wagging tail you may continue to approach cautiously. But, if the ears are forward while the tail is slow and still, you may want to stop or even back off a little while attempting to reassure the animals.

Ears laid back-Can either be a sign of submission or aggression. Stop or back off while you assess other areas on the dog.

The Eyes

Use care to avoid staring directly into the eyes of the dog. The dog may interpret this as a challenge and attack.

Eyes focused on you-Displays confidence on the part of the dog. If combined with a wagging tail and erect ears, may invite further approach. However, if combined with a low, still tail and laid back ears, the dog may be preparing for an attack.

Eyes looking at you and then off to the side-shows confusion and possibly an effort on the dog's part to identify an avenue of escape. Take a moment to reassure the dog without approaching any closer. If the dog is looking for an escape route and you cut her off, you may provoke an aggressive response.

Eyes looking down-shows submission. Approach slowly while offering a calm reassuring voice. Continue to monitor all areas for any change in body language.

The Mouth

Any retraction of the lips and display of teeth, in the presence of other aggressive signs should alert you to back off. Some dogs will display a 'submissive grin' upon greeting. This display will be combined with submissive and relaxed body language.

Panting-Dogs may pant when stressed or excited.

Vocalization

Although a small part of communication, vocalization should not be ignored while approaching an animal.

Growling-a clear display of aggression. When a dog bares her teeth and begins to growl, slowly back away immediately.

Barking-Shows excitement and, possibly, confusion on the part of the dog, but not necessarily aggression. Take some time to reevaluate other factors and try to calm the animal before approaching further.

Whimpering or whining-A clear show of submission. You should be able to continue approaching while reassuring the dog.

Other Notes

The dog's stance can also give you clues to the dog's demeanor. Any attempts by the dog to make herself look larger (i.e. hackles raised, body leaning forward) are signs of aggressiveness. Likewise, attempts to make the body look smaller (i.e. body leaning back, tail tucked, lying on the ground) are usually signs of submission. A very important exception to this rule is that a dog preparing to attack will lay her ears back, tuck her tail and lower her body prior to the attack.

Often, you will find different signals coming from different parts of the body. It is up to you to develop a good understanding of their body language to protect yourself and ease the stress of the animals you work with.

USING A NET

Nets are used for small fractious animals, including feral cats, opossums and raccoons.

- First close all the doors to the room where the animal is housed. Should she escape, she will still be confined to one room.
- Secondly, have the cage or area she is being moved to clean and set up as needed.
- Approach all wild or feral animals with caution. A sudden move from you usually triggers a sudden response from them.
- Do not assemble a crowd of people to assist you. Remember, feral cats or wildlife are stressed by humans. One person is adequate to net an animal.
- If the animal is in a cage-slowly, with as little noise as possible, open the cage door only wide enough to allow passage of the net through the crack.
- Do not look the animal in the eyes, however be sure not to take your eyes off of the animal.
- Set the net gently over the animal (do not scoop – slow fluttering movements are less likely to excite him).
- Once the animal is in the net, remove all food dishes, water bowls and litter pans from the cage, this will allow you more room to work.
- The next step is to maneuver the animal, in his attempts to keep away from you, will step back over the frame of the net into the mesh pocket.
- When you lift the handle of the net this frame will cut off the exit hole. Gently lift the animal and place him in the cleaned cage, carrier or treatment area.
- If the animal is kept in the net for restraint, place a towel over her head and body to decrease stimuli and calm the animal.
- If necessary, sedatives or anesthetic agents can be administered through the net.
- Open the pocket to allow the animal to move out of the net. The net can be tipped up and slid gently out to encourage the animal to move out,
- Quickly, but smoothly and quietly remove the net from the cage, close and secure the door

USING A CONTROL POLE

A control pole can be a valuable tool, allowing the handler to control and move an animal from place to place while keeping it a safe distance away to prevent being bitten or clawed. However, inappropriate or unskilled use can cause serious injury to the animal. Clinic volunteers are NEVER to use the control pole. If an aggressive animal needs to be handled, ASK FOR ASSISTANCE from an experienced veterinarian or technician. The information here is provided only to give you a better idea of how the control pole works.

How it Works

Control poles come in a variety of lengths. Our commercial control poles have a braided, spring-loaded stainless steel cable that runs through an aluminum shaft and forms an adjustable loop in one end. The loop is placed over the animal's head or body and the end of the cable is pulled to make the loop fit securely around the animal, so it cannot get away or attack. The loop should be snug enough that the animal cannot pull out of it, but NOT SO TIGHT that it cuts off the animal's breathing or circulation. At the opposite end of the pole is the cable release knob. Pulling the knob allows the internal spring to pop the loop open to its largest size so the pole can be removed from the animal.

ALWAYS CHECK A CONTROL POLE BEFORE USING IT to be sure the cable pulls and releases smoothly and completely without binding. Do not store a control pole on the floor, which can damage the release mechanism. Always store on a wall hook.

Getting the Loop Over the Animal's Head

This can be tricky, depending on the animal and the circumstances. Dogs can't push the loop away, but quickly learn to turn their head to avoid it. Try to place the loop just past the skull at the smallest part of the neck so the dog cannot pull its head out of the loop. Try to keep the swivel (on the end of the pole) behind the dog's head.

One of the more dangerous situations is an aggressive dog confined in a kennel or other enclosed space. If the animals can run and dodge it may need to be cornered to be caught. WARNING: CORNERING AN ANIMAL MAY CAUSE IT TO CHARGE. This kind of situation requires a second staff member for assistance and back-up. Always have two experienced staff members present. If in doubt, ask for help.

In some cases, an animal on a control pole may try to bite anything in reach, howl, scream, bark, urinate and defecate. Dogs often bite the plastic cover on the pole so frantically that they bite their tongues and bleed profusely. You can imagine that this kind of scene is extremely unpleasant to watch, so it is recommended that members of the public be asked to clear the scene if you need to use a control pole.

Leading the Animal

You should have a plan of action before getting the animal on a control pole. This means knowing where to lead the animal and clearing your path of people, other animals and obstacles in advance. Once the animal is on the pole, give her a little leeway so she does not feel over-powered or over-controlled. Pushing or pulling too forcefully encourages the animal to resist and fight. A dog that is frightened can often be kept calm by letting it move around a little to keep its balance.

Try to keep the animal moving smoothly, avoiding stops and starts. Expect to have to push and/or pull if the animal changes directions suddenly. If the dog is large and strong you may want to have someone help you lead it, possibly with a second control pole.