

# Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors

Promoting the Best in Pet Behaviour



## Introduction

Welcome to the APBC Veterinary Newsletter Summer 2012. I do hope that you enjoy this edition and look forward to hearing any comments or ideas for future editions. This is my first attempt at the technical side of things so please do contact me if you experience any problems. Please email me at [apbcvetnewsletter@googlemail.com](mailto:apbcvetnewsletter@googlemail.com). Clare Wilson, APBC Veterinary Representative.

## How to Find Your Local Member

Please follow this link if you have a case you would like to discuss with or refer to your local APBC member [www.apbc.org.uk/help/regions](http://www.apbc.org.uk/help/regions). As the behaviour profession is still currently unregulated it is absolutely vital, as with all other referrals, that you seek appropriately qualified, educated, experienced and recognised behaviourists. The APBC has rigorous selection criteria for its full members and you can be assured that full members will work to the APBC code of practice and are up to date in using modern, welfare-friendly methods.



Clare Wilson MA VetMB MRCVS  
DipCABC, current veterinary representative on the APBC committee, working part time in general practice, part time in behaviour consultations and full time as a mummy and pet owner.



Stephanie Hedges BSc (hons), CertHE AAB, current veterinary nurse representative on the APBC committee, working full time as a behaviour counsellor.



## **Five Top Tips for a Cat Friendly Approach.**

*Clare Wilson MA VetMB MRCVS  
DipCABC*

**Many cats find it stressful attending the veterinary surgery. They are not used to the confinement of a cat carrier, they are not used to car travel and they are especially sensitive to changes in routine and scents in the environment around them. Below are a few tips to help you and your clients to make visits less stressful.**

1. Encourage owners to leave their cat box, with bedding, out at home all the time so that the cat becomes used to it and does not only associate it with trips to the vet and the cattery. Nearly all owners report that their cat runs away as soon as it spots the box! Many cats will actually enjoy using the box as a cosy resting place all year round if it is placed appropriately in the home. The familiar scent and sight of the box will help keep the cat relaxed on his journey to the surgery. For regular visitors to the surgery it may be worth clients purchasing Feliway spray to use on the bedding of the carrier.
2. If space at your surgery allows have a separate waiting area for cats so that they do not become upset by the presence of dogs. Even cats who live with dogs will be



## **Kennel guarding.**

*Clare Wilson MA VetMB MRCVS  
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**It is not uncommon for dogs to react adversely to being kennelled in the hospital either as day patients for routine surgery or as inpatients that require a longer stay. This can not only cause problems for the staff that need to handle these animals but is also a serious welfare consideration for the patients. In dogs that are coming in for routine surgery such as neutering it is absolutely vital that they do not have an adverse experience or they may become frightened of future visits. It may also affect their response to pre-medication if they are stressed. Careful and sensitive handling is crucial. In dogs that are ill and have been admitted as inpatients the same applies but it is also crucial to bear in mind the adverse effects of stress on the healing process. Stress resulting in a slower recovery time leads to a longer stay and further stress.**

**Points to consider:**

- Kennel guarding dogs are FRIGHTENED. A frightened animal has four potential responses – freeze, flight, fawn or fight. An animal that is confined in a cage is very limited as to which options it can use and is therefore much more likely to use fight as a strategy, showing

scared by the presence of unfamiliar dogs. Practices are increasingly providing separate waiting areas for feline clients and this not only keep the cats and their clients happier, it also demonstrates to the clients that you recognize the importance of veterinary care for our feline friends.

3. If space does not allow a separate waiting area then you could consider having a cat only consulting period which especially caters for clients with nervous cats. The practicalities of timings will not make this suitable for all clients but it will help a proportion of cats.

4. Getting the cat out of the carrier. Stressed cats are usually not keen to come out of their box to be examined and the manner in which you approach this dilemma can make a large difference to the response of the cat to further handling. The ideal situation is where the top of the carrier can be removed (picture below) and the cat can then be examined inside the box and perhaps taken out if relaxed enough after a preliminary discussion.



5. Unlike with dogs, giving a cat time to settle in is much less effective. Nervous dogs will often relax and settle in the consulting room if you have a short chat with the owner before attempting any interaction with the dog. However once a cat is stressed it tends to remain stressed for a far longer period of time and therefore for cats it is much better to gently and carefully get on with the consultation and make handling as brief

defensive aggression to scare away the threat. The door of the cage acts as a barrier to give the dog confidence that aggression will work as a strategy.

- During the admission process question the owner about whether the dog has been left with strangers before, has it been crated before, has it been to kennels before, how does it respond to situations that concern it – is it a dog that tends to use aggression as a strategy or one that uses appeasing gestures?
- Take care how you approach the cage. It is vital that you avoid accidentally appearing as a threat. Eye contact is potentially confrontational and may initiate an aggressive outburst. **Avert your gaze as you approach the cage.** A head-on approach is also potentially confrontational – **approach from the side** of the cage and with your body facing sideways to the dog. **Talk gently as you approach** so the dog knows you are not a threat. If you have a secure area than **open the kennel door and allow the animal to come out and approach you** rather than reaching in to the cage to take a lead.
- Avoid the problem developing – if a dog is nervous when admitted then ensure that it is left to relax - perhaps cover part of the kennel door with a blanket to make it more private. If it is not due for surgery and is ok to be fed then feed high value tit bits each time any staff pass the cage.
- Follow-up. If there has been an issue with kennel guarding

as is possible for obtaining an appropriate diagnosis, checking a post-op wound or doing a general health check.



## Behaviour as a Tool in Practice

*By Stuart Greenfield, Behaviourist at Fitzpatrick Referrals, APBC Student Member*

Having worked within a referral veterinary practice for 3 years it has become apparent to me that one of the problems facing veterinary kennels is that of dogs undergoing emotional stress or heightened emotional states.

Studies have shown how dogs entering the veterinary practice and undergoing a preliminary examination exhibit behaviours related to heightened emotional states of fear (Vonderen *et al* 1998, Vaisanen *et al* 2005, Doring *et al* 2009). Within these studies it was shown that being in the veterinary kennel environment without any procedures being carried out can result in a higher heart rate and exhibition of displacement behaviours (Vaisanen *et al* 2005). Both increased heart rate and displacement behaviour have been linked to a heightened emotional state. Doring *et al* (2009) also found that dogs that had a predominantly positive experience of a veterinary practice were less fearful than dogs that had negative experiences (Doring *et al* 2009).

These results highlight how the veterinary environment can effect the dogs emotional state, and how

then it is really important to address the ongoing relationship between that dog and the staff at the surgery. Ideally the dog should be invited back at regular intervals to come in for some food treats and a fuss with no examination or procedure occurring. If the situation is explained to clients as a long term solution to ensure their dog is easy to handle at future vet visits then this will encourage compliance.



## Do Mischievous Dogs Reveal their Guilt?

*by Stephanie Hedges BSc(hons) CertHE AAB, Full Member of the APBC.*

Many owners report that their dogs look 'guilty' after they have done something the owner feels is wrong. This perception of the dog's acceptance of their 'wrong doing' may then lead the owner to punish the dog. But does the dog have such awareness – or is our interpretation of the dogs 'guilty look' a bad case of anthropomorphism? In humans guilt is considered a self-conscious act of violating an established rule the person has agreed to follow (Hecht *et. al.* 2012). The body language associated with guilt in humans, such as head turning and avoiding eye contact, is suggested to elicit forgiveness or make amends thereby maintaining social bonds. Dogs also show similar behaviour,

the dogs experience can shape its future reactions to similar stimuli. From this comes my proposal that behaviour is an important part of an animals experience within practice.

Numerous studies have outlined how a kennel environment can result in both behavioural and physiological emotional stress symptoms such as vocalisations and a heightened cortisol level (Hennessey *et al* 1997, Beerda *et al* 2000, Stephen & Ledger 2006, Hilby *et al* 2006, Rooney *et al* 2007). By looking at these studies it becomes apparent the effect hospitalisation, where the dogs are subjected to both the veterinary environment and a kennel environment, may have on dogs.

As the carers of these dogs it is our responsibility to ensure the welfare standards are as high as they can possibly be. This includes taking care of the dogs' mental well being. This can be improved by implementing behavioural techniques to relieve stress and provide mental stimulation.

It has been seen in various papers that dogs experiencing stress related symptoms in kennels show both a reduced prevalence of stress related behaviours and a lowered physiological stress response when they are subjected to a form of training or mental stimulation (Hennessey *et al* 1998, Coppola *et al* 2006, Bergamasco *et al* 2010). So why not bring this logic into our practices to improve our patients' welfare and to enhance positive associations with the veterinary practice to reduce stress when the animal next needs to be exposed to this environment?

This is what I am doing at Fitzpatrick Referrals in Surrey where I am the resident behaviourist.

such as lowering the head and body and looking way, to appease (try to avert) a perceived threat (Rugaas, 2009). However, 74% of humans said they felt their dogs experienced guilt (Morris *et al.*, 2008) and it is common for humans to interpret these behaviour as such. Can they also be a sign that the dog recognises it has 'violated an established rule' and is trying to seek forgiveness? The earliest widely recognised research into the subject was published by Vollmer in 1977. Owners were asked to shred some paper and then leave their dogs alone with it. On their return the dogs were reported to show 'guilty' behaviour. The fact they had not caused the damage and yet still showed such behaviour was interpreted as the dog appeasing the owner due to the presence of a stimulus associated with past punishments. However, is this the sole trigger for the appeasing behaviour? Some more recent papers shed further light on what else may be affecting it. Horowitz' 2008 paper describes a study in which 14 dogs that had been trained to leave a treat were commanded to do so whilst their owner left the room, leaving the dog with the experimenter. Once the owner had left the experimenter then either immediately removed the treat or encouraged the dog to eat it. When the owner subsequently returned the experimenter then told some owners that their dog had eaten the treat and others they had not, regardless of what the dog had actually done. They then observed the dog's behaviour towards the owner.

There was no significant difference in the frequency of behaviours typically interpreted as 'guilty' between those dogs that had and hadn't eaten the treat ( $p = 0.23$ ). However there was a significant increase in the 'guilty' behaviours



By using a simple 'Sit' (above) or 'Down' (top) or even teaching a 'Leave' which requires no movement at all (beneficial for recumbent dogs) it has been seen that the dogs produce fewer stress related behaviours in kennels.



For practices or times when there simply is no time for this training feeding tools such as Kongs can be used (above). Schipper et al (2008) found that kennelled dogs exhibited fewer barking/vocalisation behaviours and higher frequencies of appetitive behaviours when a Kong was placed in the environment (Schipper et al 2008). These also help produce a calming chemical in the body through the motion of licking and chewing to retrieve the food which can enhance the desired effect of reduced stress. By utilising the idea of mental stimulation as a stress relief we can enhance the welfare of our patients which in turn

seen in dogs whose owners believed they had taken the treat compared to those whose owners who believed their dog had not ( $p = <0.001$ ). In fact the dogs showing the greatest 'guilty' behaviours were those that had not stolen the treat but whose owners had been told they had ( $p = 0.03$ ). A further trial was also performed in which the dog was left alone until it did eat the treat of its own volition, to eliminate any possible effect of the dog feeling 'absolved' of guilt when encouraged to eat the treat by another human. The behaviours did not vary from the trials in which the dogs had been given the food ( $p <0.05$ ). This implies that the dogs 'guilty' behaviour is simply a reaction to their owner's anger or correction, not any sense of guilt or understanding of what they may have done earlier. However, many owners suggest their dog looks guilty before they have seen any damage and so shown any disapproval. If the dog's behaviour is in response to human signals then how can this be explained? Hecht et. al. (2012) performed a study in which 64 dogs were trained using positive punishment (scolding) not to take a food item left on a plate whilst the owners back was turned (fig 1). They were then left completely alone with the food for 3 minutes (fig 2). When the owner returned the plate of food was obscured from view so they did not know if the dog had eaten the food or not, removing any possibility the dog was responding to signals from the owner. They were then asked to report whether their dog looked guilty or not. Control scores were also taken of the dogs greeting behaviour to their owner before and after the experiment. The dog's scores on their owners return did not vary significantly between the experiment and control scores, regardless of whether they had

makes handling safer for both us and them, and builds up positive associations which have the potential to reduce stress during subsequent visits.



### Useful information

- Please check the following link for up and coming events of interest  
[www.apbc.org.uk/events](http://www.apbc.org.uk/events).
- The Annual Feline Conference will be held on 22nd October in Kettering - early bird price deadline is 1st August 2012 so don't forget to book soon!
- There are also various events in the Veterinary CPD series from now until November 2012.
- See the following link for tips on feline friendly practice  
[www.wellcat.org](http://www.wellcat.org)
- New book just been published for recommending to new puppy owners 'Life Skills for Puppies' by Daniel Mills and Helen Zulch.

eaten the treat or not ( $p = 0.131$ ).

These studies cannot categorically eliminate the possibility that dogs experience the emotion of guilt. However they do suggest that perceived guilty behaviour when a dog's owner comes home to find a misdemeanour is more likely to be due to associated past punishments or the owner's behaviour than any perception the dog has of having done wrong. Therefore, if punishments are then delivered they risk causing confusion in the dog, which may subsequently lead to the development of anxious or aggressive behaviour (Lindsay, 2000).



Remember that the best piece of advice you can give puppies owners about socialisation is to gently expose their puppies to variety - learning that novelty is not scary is the key! (Picture above left: puppies meeting egg boxes, flower pots, different surfaces. Picture above: puppy meeting small child in funny outfit)

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