

10 Tips for Making Veterinary Visits More Enjoyable for You and Your Dog

The following exercises can be begun immediately with today's veterinary visit. You will see the most improvement in your dog's behavior if you continue to do a little work on these exercises in a variety of settings to help your dog be more relaxed and confident for all of his future visits. Have fun!

1. **Be Prepared**: Be sure to bring soft, highly reinforcing treats that you reserve for training and visiting the veterinarian. If your dog will not eat treats at your veterinarian's office, reinforce the click with praise, petting, or both. Remember it is believed that the sound of the click alone is calming to the amygdala of the brain.
2. **"Calm Gets You Everything"**: Reinforcing (strengthening) your dog's calm attention to you before you go into the exam room can dramatically and positively influence the visit to follow. Starting as soon as you arrive at the waiting room, be sure to click and treat your dog for all calm behavior offered (standing still, sitting, laying down, remaining quiet).
3. **"Crazy Gets You Nothing"**: Be careful not to reinforce agitated behavior like whining, barking, or scrabbling and pulling on the lead. Instead of trying to soothe your dog, click and feed for small decreases in those aroused behaviors, working towards their absence altogether. Know that you can mark the pieces of behavior that are lower in intensity to help teach your dog what really 'pays.'
4. **Relaxed Restraint**: Teach your dog to accept restraint by clicking and feeding as he is being held for a procedure. Let the veterinary technician know ahead of time that this is what you would like to do. At home, have people the dog likes gently restrain him while you click and treat for your dog remaining still. Gradually build the length of time your dog can be held in this manner.
5. **Happy Handling**: Teach your dog to accept (and even enjoy) all-over handling by clicking and feeding your dog as he allows you to touch his legs, his feet, his tail, and his muzzle. Pretend to clean his ears, separate his toes, and massage his skin. Click and feed for each successful movement that is tolerated. Through clicker training, your dog will come to enjoy this interaction.
6. **Hand Target Training**: Teach your dog to touch his nose to your hand and build up to him being able to follow the target of your hand so that

you can lead your dog through the various activities with ease and without the need to push/pull your dog into place.

You can begin this exercise by simply extending your hand to within 1-2" of your dog's nose. As the dog turns to sniff your hand, click and feed your dog. If you need to entice your dog to sniff your hand, hold a treat in between two of your fingers. Click and allow the dog to eat the treat between your fingers. As your dog becomes more familiar with the exercise, move your hand to each side of the dog's face. Hold your hand above the dog's head and below. When he is targeting your hand reliably in all of these positions, hold your hand slightly beyond the front of his nose so that he will have to take a step to touch your hand. Click and feed your dog as he moved forward to touch your hand. Try on step, two steps, three steps, and so forth. Continue building the behavior so that you can stick out your hand and your dog will follow it for several steps, including having to get his body onto something (bench, rock wall, low table) or even under something (bench, chair, etc.)

7. Safe and Secure: If you suspect your dog might be inclined to nip or bite when frightened or stressed, be sure to have the ability to muzzle him if needed. Click and feed him as he touches the muzzle. Click and feed him as you hold it up close to his face. Click and feed him as the muzzle gets closer. Continue to shape this behavior until you are able to put the muzzle on his nose. Click and take it right off. Lengthen the time that the muzzle is on the dog's nose.

Muzzles can help make everybody feel more relaxed which will help lower the stress of the visit.

8. Compliance in Close Confines: Teach the dog to stand/stay or sit/stay in a confined area. For example, teach the dog to go into a crate voluntarily or teach the dog to sit with his back or the side of his body next to a wall with people standing very close/gently touching him.

Just as people have 'personal space' they like to maintain, so does your dog. Help him become more comfortable performing known behaviors even with people or equipment crowding him.

9. Making Strange Surfaces Less Scary: Teach your dog to stand and walk on many different slippery surfaces like plastic, metal, and rubber. (Make sure that there are no sharp edges that your dog could injure themselves on.) Simply click and feed your dog for putting one paw on, followed by another, and so on, until the dog is standing

squarely on the surface. Now that the dog is comfortable, ask your dog to sit. Click and feed. Ask your dog to walk back and forth over the surface. Click and feed. Ask your dog to lie down. Click and feed.

This exercise will help your dog feel comfortable whether he is being weighed on the rubbery mat, being examined on the cold, stainless steel exam table, walking across the slippery linoleum floor, or lying prostrate on an X-Ray table.

10. Clicking = Common Language: Clicker trained dogs quickly learn that all people that click (veterinarians, veterinary technicians, groomers, etc.) are predictable, effective communicators. As the click means the same thing all the time, regardless of who is actually doing the clicking, your dog immediately has a familiar and positive frame of reference with the new person.

Clicker training creates a 'common language' that your dog understands and can help put him at ease in strange or stressful situations.

You will be pleasantly surprised at the improvements in your dog's behavior by spending just a few minutes several times a week on these behaviors.