

The Veterinary Olympics

(Or a whole bunch of things you can teach your dog to make it the best patient the vet has ever seen)

The sit, stay, roll-over event:

1. Stand in stay position with owner's hand on head or neck and at most a hand gently resting under abdomen.
2. Teach your dog to sit on command.
3. Teach your dog to lift one paw (shake)
4. Have your dog lay on each side with legs away from you and your hands holding gently both lower legs (typical restraint for most lameness exams).
5. Teach your dog to tolerate you giving them a bear hug around the neck (typical restraint position)
6. Teach them to lie on their back (for a belly rub).
7. If possible, gradually and with someone else's help teach them to lie on their back with front and back legs extended. Then on side with front and back legs extended. (X-ray positions)

The people desensitization relay:

1. Have another individual approach in positions 1 and 2 above.
2. Have the approaching person wear a large jacket, white if possible.
3. Have above person wear a rope or ideally a stethoscope around the neck (cheap imitations in dress up kits for kids or ask your vet).
4. Teach your dog to allow another person to hold the paw (great for catheters or drawing blood samples).
5. Have your dog lay on each side with legs away from you and your hands holding gently both lower legs. After they are comfortable with this have someone else look between their toes and gently manipulate the legs.
6. Teach them (lots of treats) to enjoy someone else holding them around the neck in a bear hug. This can upset some dogs enough to bite so go very slowly and only do if you are comfortable that it won't push your dog beyond the bite threshold.

7. Teach them to walk politely on a leash away from you led by someone else (especially important if you own a 150lb great dane)

The how many places can you touch on your dog event:

1. Teach your dog to tolerate you handling the paws.
2. Accustom your dog to handling of ears and opening of mouth.
3. Look at your dog's eyes and shine a penlight in the eyes.
4. Teach your dog to sit with you holding gently around the muzzle and lifting the head up gently to expose the neck. Then have someone gently press on the neck. Can even pour a tiny amount of alcohol on the neck. Simulates jugular blood samples.
5. Have someone else do the above.

The new place generalization marathon (The more new locations the better):

1. Teach your dog to stand stay on a table (may want to always do this on a special towel and take that towel to the vet)
2. Repeat the stand stay (and various other behaviors on the table).
3. Now repeat on a park bench outside.
4. Repeat at a friend's house (with their permission of course).
5. Go on short car rides - treat extensively during trip and when get there (If he tends to get carsick try treating for car trips to the end of the drive or go to the nearest park and play instead).
6. Drive to the vet's when they are closed or slow (don't do late at night and always with veterinarian's permission -they can recommend slow times). Play or practice obedience in the grass or waiting room.
7. Teach them the joys of crate training (crating unfortunately happens at the vet and crate trained dogs fair better).
8. Teach them the joys of being crated in places other than home.
9. Teach your dog it is fun to be crated in strange places with you and various other people coming and going (simulates hospitalization).

Weird and scary equipment event:

1. Teach your dog to tolerate or enjoy nail clips.
2. Teach your dog clippers are sources of treats (not scary monsters).

3. Teach your dog that muzzles are fun (many dogs will growl or snap when hurt and must be muzzled for human safety - making the muzzle a fun thing prior and knowing how to put one on will provide safety and significantly less stress for your dog. Veterinarians can't risk bites to you, them, or their staff, and even nice dogs will bite if they hurt enough.)

4. Teach them to enjoy being brushed.

5. Teach yourself that your dog can love an e-collar. Most dogs tolerate very well but anxious dogs may be worth accustoming.

6. Desensitize your dog to a stethoscope (toy ones work fine). Use it first then have others use. Your dog should face forward and stand calmly. If your dog pants, gently close his mouth.

7. Teach them to enjoy bathes (It is occasionally necessary to give therapeutic baths).

The gold medal finalists event (The harder, less common, or more bizarre things):

1. Teach them to allow you to brush their teeth.

2. If you have a breed with tendency toward ear problems, clean the ears starting at a young age with a mild cleaner (ask your vet for recommendations). Repeat every week or 2.

3. Teach your dog to enjoy other people getting it out of and putting it in a crate. Be careful and go slow. With a nervous dog this is a possible area where dogs will bite.

4. Teach your dog to tolerate its temperature being taken.

The above are not a complete list and are not always broken into all the mini steps needed to desensitize your dog. These will however dramatically increase the odds of your dog having a more pleasant trip to the vet. Everyone who works in a vet office has heard - My dog knew he was going to the vet, My dog hates car rides, I don't understand why he's growling when he's so friendly at home, etc. The list is intended to start you thinking about all of the weird stressful things that can happen at a trip to the vet.

Most training involves breaking behaviors into the tiniest bits and teaching them step by step, but few people take the extra time to teach the unusual behaviors asked for when the pet is sick. I'll be quite honest, my dog (a rescue) still needs to be muzzled for some things and can't do all the above. But she loves the car and is gradually tolerating more and more unusual requests.

Also ask your vet about their policies involving giving treats during exams, after exams, and during various procedures. Do not get upset if your dog fusses or if the vet thinks it is better to have a qualified technician handling the dog. Many owners and veterinary staff members get bitten every year because of improper or inadequate restraint. Those staff members need their fingers to be able to do surgery, put in catheters, and otherwise take

care of your pet. Also remember the emergency clinic is a new set of people. This may mean that a dog that is good at the regular veterinarian will bite at the emergency clinic. Also please only bring your dog to the vet on a leash or in a crate. Dogs left to wander the waiting room can escape and get hit by a car, can fight with another dog, or stress a cat quietly minding its own business.

Lisa Polazzi

polazzil@hotmail.com

copyright 2002 Lisa Polazzi