

ANIMAL HANDLING AND RESTRAINT

Proper restraint and handling techniques are essential not only to maximize success in completing procedures safely, but also to minimize stress on the patient. As a rule, the least restraint necessary for the procedure is generally the best restraint since dogs display the widest range of extreme behavioral reactions when being restrained. Remember:

- 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:

- Observe the animal prior to handling. Facial expressions, behavior and body language/ posture will provide indicators as to the patient's overall demeanor.
- Be aware of the special stressors for animals in the clinic setting. The veterinary practice is stressful for many animals - the activity, sounds, smells and other animals can cause confusion and fear.
- Some animals have not been handled or examined before and may not be leash trained. They may not have any experience on a leash or other type of restraint and may panic in response.
- Even the most social animal may exhibit aggression toward other animals, particularly in a strange environment and may redirect to nearby people when over-stimulated.
- Never put your face directly into the face of a dog or cat or other animal.
- Do not move in behind or crowd around a dog.
- Concentrate on the animal you are handling without being distracted by other activities.
- NEVER sit on the floor while handling/examining a dog. If the animal becomes aggressive or aroused, you will be unable to move away or protect yourself and risk serious injury.

Understanding Animal Behavior

Safe and effective animal handling requires a thorough understanding of the normal behavior and responses of each species. You are encouraged to access the "ADDITIONAL TRAINING RESOURCES" below for resources on animal behavior. If there is any doubt about the temperament of an animal-ASK FOR ASSISTANCE. Remember- safety of staff and owners comes first, followed closely by the safety of the animal.

Communication

Any animal exhibiting potentially aggressive behavior should have a notation posted on their cage and in their medical record to alert others who may be handling the animal. Specific alerts or recommendations should be written on the sign and in the medical record to provide staff and other volunteers 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 for the procedure 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. 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. Do not sit on the ground as you will be unable to move away or protect yourself if necessary.
- 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.

Types of restraint

The types of restraint and methods needed for safe handling will vary from patient to patient. Several restraint and handling techniques are accessible in the “ADDITIONAL TRAINING RESOURCES” section below and you are encouraged to review them. Here are some common general restraint techniques and equipment used in veterinary practices:

- 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 dogs 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. Make a figure-eight harness by looping the free end of a slip lead back through the metal ring. The looser loop is placed around the chest behind the cat's front legs and the other loop placed around the neck with the metal ring/handle on top between the shoulders. This will prevent the cat from escaping or injuring someone should she get loose from your restraint. The harness should be put on at intake and can be left on the cat throughout their stay.
 - Your hand: A very 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.
 - Ketch/ Rabies/ Control Pole (also called a Head Snare): The control pole is used to safely handle extremely aggressive dogs. 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, an experienced staff member should be consulted for assistance as the animal will also be evaluated for chemical restraint options.
 - 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. Effective use of the net requires some training and practice. If you need to handle a feral or fractious cat ask for assistance.
 - Muzzles: Muzzles are used when a snappy or potentially aggressive 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. Even with a securely placed muzzle, appropriate handling must be used to prevent injury from an animal who resists. 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.

- **Chemical Restraint:** 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 supervisor to determine whether sedation is appropriate.

ANIMAL HANDLING AND RESTRAINT SAFETY QUESTIONS

What are the body postures, facial expressions, and behavioral signs of aggression demonstrated by the animals seen in your practice?

What restraint and handling techniques are used in the practice?

What restraint and handling equipment is available in the practice and where is it stored?

How is restraint and handling equipment properly used?

What is the practice's communication policy to warn employees of high-risk aggressive animals?

What is the practice's policy on managing aggressive animals?

Who do employees report aggressive animals to in the practice?

ADDITIONAL TRAINING RESOURCES

More information about dog handling and restraint can be accessed at cvma-inline.net in the "Workplace Safety" section.

A Bite and Scratch Avoidance online self-guided training course is available to VISC Insurance Policy Holders. Contact VISC at visc-ins.com or call (888) 762-3143 for details. To access the training courses, go to <https://learning.syntrio.com/VET/login.asp>?

California Department of Public Health booklet on [Investigation, Management and Prevention of Animal Bites in California](#).

Penn and Foster Dog Handling and Restraint Manual: <https://www.pennfoster.edu/~media/files/pdf/samplelessons/396-veterinary-technician-associate-degree.pdf?la=en>

Iowa State Animal Handling Trainings: http://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/Emergency-Response/Just-in-Time/08-Animal-Behavior-Restraint-CompAnim_PPT-SPN.pdf