

THE FEAR FREE CONCEPT

“Fear Free” is the concept within veterinary medicine that involves being able to reduce the feelings of stress in our patients, which in return, will result in a better experience for all involved — including pets, their owners, and our staff. The Fear Free concept is based on recognizing and taking steps to reduce fear, anxiety, and stress (referred to as FAS) associated with visits to the veterinary hospital and requires good communication and cooperation between the pet owner(s) and veterinary team.

In order to reduce FAS, we first must understand how our canine and feline patients communicate signs of FAS to us.

Dogs: tense face, lips drawn back, tail down, body lowered, dilated pupils, snarling or growling

Cats: tucked tail, crouched posture, dilated pupils, ears pinned down to the sides, hissing, growling

The first step in addressing FAS is a discussion with the owner regarding any concerns they have about bringing their pet into the veterinary hospital or any known stressors for the pet. A stressor can be any “experience, environment, an inanimate or living object that disrupts the body’s normal state of functioning”. Some examples of stressors to our pets include noises, odors, pain, disease processes, and unfamiliar people. Our number one goal is to reduce stress. Stress has such negative effects on pets, their owners, and the whole veterinary team. Ultimately, it can result in decreased veterinary wellness visits, a decreased ability to appropriately examine and treat the pet, and slower recovery from disease or injury.

Tips for Developing Fear Free Transportation:

Dogs: Short car trips with positive rewards to introduce them to the concept of car rides, using treats and toys as incentives, using appeasing pheromone sprays to encourage a calm state (D.A.P), driving with calm music or in a quiet car, avoiding hard stops or starts.

Cats: Leaving the pet carrier out in a common area of the home with comfortable bedding inside and the door left open, using treats, toys or cat nip as incentives, using an appeasing pheromone to encourage a calm state (Feliway), calm and quiet car trips, avoiding hard stops and starts.

Once at the veterinary hospital, to reduce stress in the waiting area, cats and dogs should be kept in separate areas as much as possible and cat carriers should be kept elevated off of the floor on a sturdy table or chair. Dogs should be leashed and kept close to the owner to minimize stress and interaction with other waiting pets. If a pet is experiencing FAS in the waiting room then we will make every attempt to get them into an exam room as soon as possible. Once in the exam room, we will use rewards such as treats, toys, or positive attention. It is important to speak in calm and quiet voices.