

What to do prior to handling companion animals

1. Assess the Environment

Make the environment comfortable for the patient

- Remove known triggers of fear or aggression for your patient (e.g., dogs, men, cats, noise)
- Decrease stimuli (e.g., light, noise, movement, touch)
- Create an exam site without slippery, shiny, cold surfaces
- Provide a way for fearful pets to hide or feel covered and protected
- Be sure you have all the supplies and equipment needed to work quickly and effectively once the examination begins. Avoid restraining animals multiple times.
- Provide pheromones (e.g., D.A.P. or Feliway®)
- Determine if having the owner present may be helpful. Many do better when together.
- Utilize food for distraction and counter-conditioning when safe

2. Assess the Animal

Monitor your patient's comfort level by tracking patient body language

Green

the patient feels safe

Yellow

the patient perceives danger

Red

the patient perceives deadly threat

3. Assess Yourself

Avoid perceived threats and track your own body language

- Avoid direct eye contact
- Avoid leaning over; bend at the knee instead of the waist. Turn your body to the side or squat down if safe
- Avoid reaching out to touch animals. Encourage them to approach you, have the handler bring them to you or approach from the side
- Avoid loud talking and sudden movements
- Ask for help or reassess if/how to proceed if you are afraid

4. Make a Handling Plan

Critically consider what needs/must be done

- Must the procedure be done today or at all?
- Select the appropriate level of restraint for the individual patient and the procedure
- Select any handling tools that will increase safety and decrease your patient's fear and arousal
- Order the required procedures from most-important to least-important in the event that the patient is unable to tolerate some of the procedures
- Perform those procedures in order of least-offensive to most-offensive so that early, difficult procedures don't inhibit your ability to complete later ones
- Chemical restraint should be added before the animal becomes too aroused
- Assess the level of pain, invasiveness, number of procedures, and how the patient is coping with minimal handling. Consider immediate sedation when it is unlikely that the patient will be able to tolerate all of the procedures.