



Veterinary Specialty of the Day: Behavior

Some veterinarians and veterinary technicians undergo further training to specialize in a specific field of medicine. Veterinarians who specialize in Behavior know how to treat behavioral problems in animals, such as aggression, anxiety, or fear. Behaviorists are trained to determine the root cause(s) of a problem behavior, including possible underlying medical conditions.

Discussion Question

- Why is it important to pay attention to your pet's behavior?

Veterinary behaviorists are trained to...



Recognize the Causes of Behavioral Problems

Problem behaviors can be the result of an animal's environment, upbringing, underlying medical condition, or a combination of all three.



Diagnose Medical Conditions Affecting Behavior

Inappropriately urinating or over-grooming are behaviors that can be the result of a medical condition and may require medication to treat.



Develop & Prescribe Treatment Programs

Individualized treatment plans attempt to modify or correct a problem behavior. Treatment plans can include training, changes to the environment, or even medication.



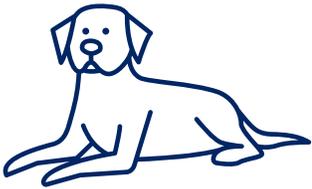
Treat Behavioral Problems in a Wide Variety of Animals

Veterinary behaviorists are not only trained to treat cats and dogs, but can help treat animals such as birds, horses, and livestock. For example, feather-picking is a common behavior problem in pet birds.

Children's Resources: Veterinary Behavior

Dog Body Language

All veterinarians should be familiar with common pet behaviors, even if they aren't a behaviorist themselves! Here are some common behaviors seen in dogs and what they generally mean.



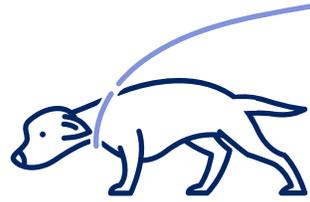
Lying Down

Relaxed



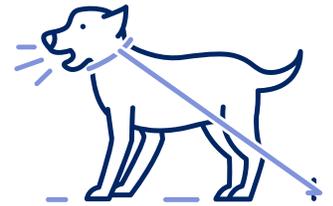
Scratching

Itchy



Sniffing

Curious



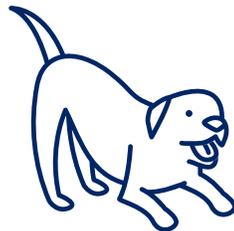
Barking

Excited or upset



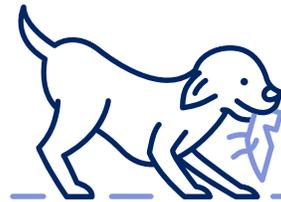
Exposing Belly

Playful



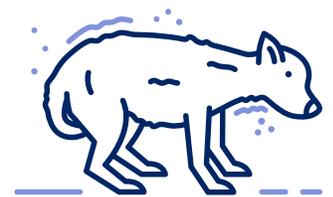
Play Bow

Playful



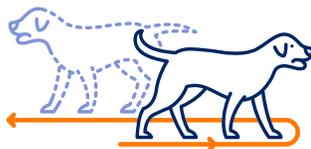
Chewing

Playful



Shaking Off

Nervous or
stressed (or wet)



Pacing

Nervous or
stressed



Lip Licking

Nervous or
stressed



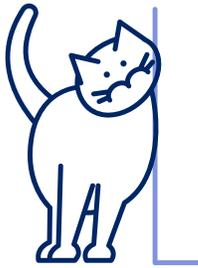
Yawning

Nervous or
stressed

Children's Resources: Veterinary Behavior

Cat Body Language

All veterinarians should be familiar with common pet behaviors, even if they aren't a behaviorist themselves! Here are some common behaviors seen in cats and what they generally mean.



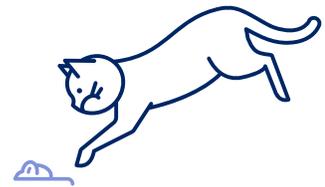
Rubbing

Happy or affectionate



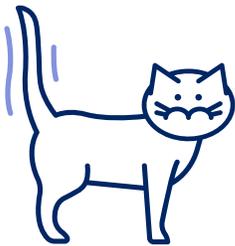
Grooming

Relaxed



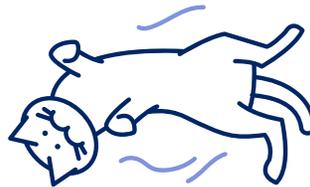
Hunting

Excited



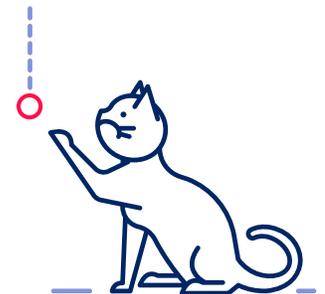
Tail Upright

Happy or content



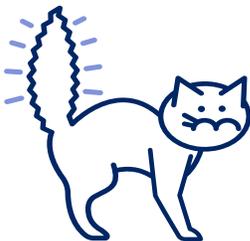
Exposing Belly

Happy or content



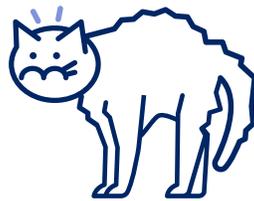
Playing

Excited



Tail Puffed Up

Frightened



Tail Tucked In

Nervous or stressed



Tail Flicking

Angry or upset

Activities



PreK & Up

Animal Behavior Charades

Materials: (optional) card stock, animal photos, pencil/marker

- Have fun exploring different animal behaviors with a game of charades!
- There are many ways to play, but the basic rule is to silently act out an animal behavior while your team tries to guess which animal you are.
- For younger kids, keep it simple! Your child can pretend to wag their tail like a dog, waddle like a penguin, or swim like a fish.
- For older kids, you can have them create their own charades cards. They can draw or print out photos of different animals performing different behaviors - for example, a monkey picking their fur or a giraffe getting a drink of water - and have them label each one. Once the cards have been completed, each person will draw a card to act out in a game of charades.



2nd Grade & Up

Teaching Tricks

Materials: clicker, treats, (optional) target stick

- If you have a family pet, such as a dog, a cat, or even a bird, you can have your child help you train them to do tricks!
- Clicker training is a type of positive reinforcement training that uses a clicker (or anything that makes a noise) to signal a behavior will be rewarded. Anything can be a clicker, whether it is a specific device, the snap of your fingers, or a specific word.
- Have your child practice tricks your pet already knows - for example, if you have a dog, they likely already know how to sit, stand, and give paw.
- **Continued on Page 5...**

Activities



2nd Grade & Up

Teaching Tricks (cont.)

Materials: clicker, treats, (optional) target stick

- Each time your pet performs the correct behavior, have your child use the clicker and give the pet a treat.
- For ideas on how to involve your child in family dog training, check out this article: <https://www.k9ofmine.com/dog-training-for-kids/>
- Don't have a pet? Make it a game to play with the whole family! Using a hand or target stick, try to teach your child a "trick", such as a jump, high five, or wave. Use your clicker each time your child gets closer to figuring out what behavior they are supposed to perform. Each time they get it right, make the clicker noise and use human "treats" such as Cheerios or M&Ms. For added fun, let your child try to train you in return!



6th - 12th Grade

Behavior Observation: Ethograms

Materials: ethogram chart (Page 6) stopwatch, pen/pencil

- Ethograms are a scientific tool used to track behavior over a period of time.
- To use an ethogram, first have your child pick the animal they would like to observe - they can choose the family pet, the birds or squirrels outside, or even a video of an animal in the wild.
- Your child should choose which behaviors they would like to study - eating, grooming, resting, and playing are some examples. Each behavior should be listed at the top of each column. Then, figure out the time intervals for the observation period - it could be 15 seconds, 30 seconds, 1 minute, etc.
- **Continued on Page 7...**

Activities



6th - 12th Grade

Behavioral Observation: Ethograms (cont.)

Materials: ethogram chart (Page 6) stopwatch, pen/pencil

- List the time intervals in the left-hand column. Make sure your child has their stopwatch and a pen/pencil.
- At each time interval, your child should observe the animal and place an X in the appropriate column. Only the behavior observed at the time interval should be recorded. If none of the behaviors on the ethogram are being performed, the child can either include an N/A column or write down the exact behavior instead.
- For an added challenge, have your child display the data they collected in a bar graph or pie chart and share their scientific findings with you.



9th - 12th Grade

Career Exploration: Veterinary Behavior

Materials: computer/tablet/phone with internet access

- The field of veterinary medicine is huge and there are many job opportunities available to those interested in pursuing a career in the field.
- If your child is interested in a career in animal behavior, encourage them to research the various job opportunities and programs that exist.
- Need a place to start? Check out this page about veterinary behaviorists: <https://www.dacvb.org/page/AnimalOwners>

References:

<https://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/cat-care/common-cat-behavior-issues>

<https://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/dog-care/common-dog-behavior-issues>

<https://www.dacvb.org/page/AnimalOwners>

<https://www.merckvetmanual.com/dog-owners/behavior-of-dogs/diagnosing-behavior-problems-in-dogs>