

HOW TO HANDLE **UNHAPPY CLIENTS**

In Your Veterinary Practice



WHY CLIENTS MAY BECOME UNHAPPY OR UPSET

Conflict happens in every hospital and clients will undoubtedly get upset. Sometimes they have reason to be unhappy and other times they may not, but we have to be prepared to deal with these situations in a way that promotes a positive outcome for both the client and the practice.

Here are some common reasons clients may become upset:



Clients often don't want to be in our hospital

Whether clients are there to get routine vaccinations for their pets or have come because of an emergency, they probably could think of something they're rather be doing. If their pet is sick or injured, they obviously have even more stress and concern that could make them more easily frustrated.



Stress feels like it's rising for them - and for us

It's been a very challenging couple of years for many people and stress in general could be rising both in our client population and in our own hospital.



Wait times add to frustration

For all of us who have sat waiting for an appointment for longer than we expected, it's clear the longer we wait the more upset we can become. We may feel like we're performing our tasks as fast as we can, but to clients waiting can feel like they're being ignored or have been forgotten.



We may have miscommunicated or not communicated at all

Have you ever arrived for a scheduled meeting or appointment and heard, "We'll be right with you"? The longer we wait, the more we might wonder what "right with you" really means. When a client expects something based on our communication and then get's something they perceive as different, stress happens.

WAYS TO PREVENT CLIENTS FROM BECOMING UPSET

There are a lot of reasons why a client conversation might become difficult, but **by addressing these questions in advance with our team** we can help client conversations go more smoothly and reduce, or even eliminate, those difficult interactions that can consume our practice.



Are we operating efficiently as a practice?

Ensuring that we are efficient in our processes, our internal communications, our training and our planning can go a long way to helping us run a more efficient practice. Do we plan at the beginning of each day? Do we regroup at lunch or shift change and refocus our team for more efficient work?



Can we communicate consistently with clients?

It's difficult to OVER communicate with clients and we often need to increase frequency and clarity of our communications, especially when they are receiving care. Do they know exactly how long their wait will actually be? Do they understand the process they will go through and who will be taking care of them? If there is a delay, do they understand why it happened? More communication can help us replace stress with understanding



Are we doing things to help educate our clients?

The more our clients know about the health and behavior of their pets, the less likely they may be to get upset. For many people the unknown is stressful. We can take steps to reduce some unknowns by doing things like offering classes, providing written information, and just spending a moment explaining what's going on with a patient. If we can educate more effectively we can reduce stress for our clients.



Are we planning, preparing, and practicing?

If your team spends time practicing how to handle unhappy clients it will continuously improve in these stressful situations. Team meetings are a great time for role play and you can plan and prepare by asking questions and letting members take turns being "angry."

WORKING WITH UNHAPPY CLIENTS IN THE MOMENT

Questions are critical tools for us to use when interacting with clients. We can use **de-escalating questions** when working through a challenging client interaction.

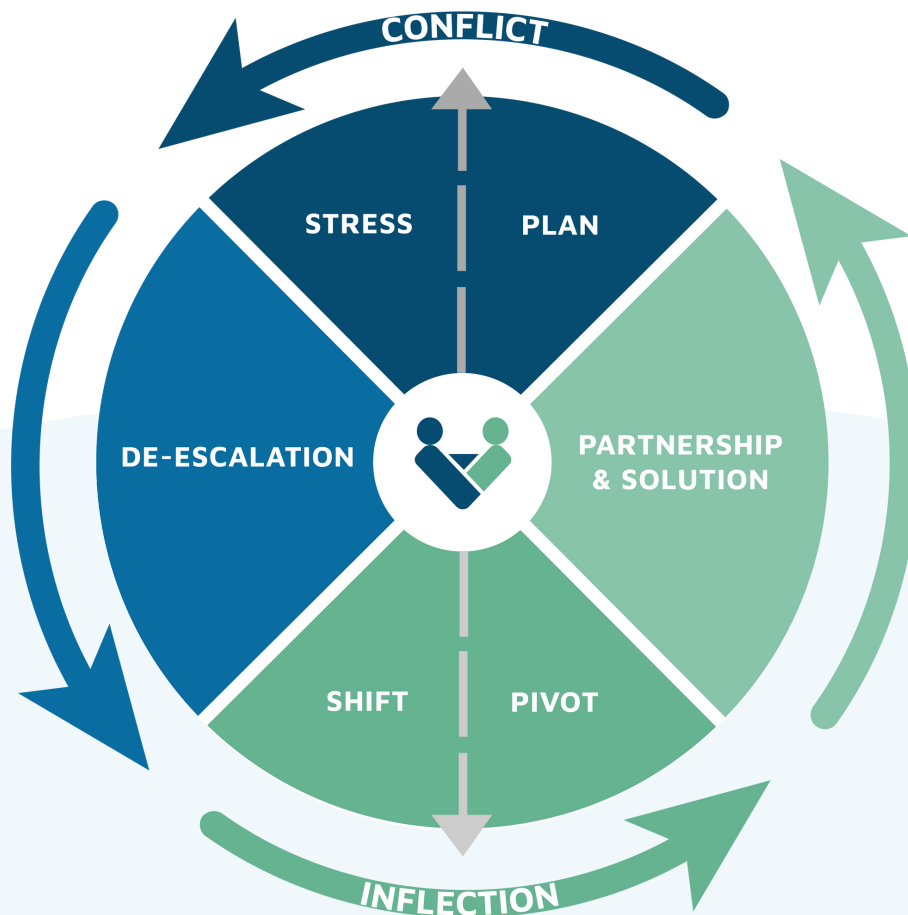
Partnering questions and statements signal to our client that finding a solution is a collaborative process.

De-escalation questions

Help me understand ...?
Tell me more about ...?
How do you ...?

Partnership questions

How can we work together to ...?
What's our next step ...?
What can we do ...?



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