

“Animals are such agreeable friends – they ask no questions, they pass no criticisms.”

- George Eliot



Humane Society of Southern Arizona
Pet V.I.P. Program

**Stress & Animal Assisted
Activities**

What makes a good Pet V.I.P. animal?

- People oriented and social
- Comfortable with being touched
- Enjoys visits
- Predictable/reliable in given situation
- Obedient
- Inspires confidence
- Able to cope with stress

What is stress???

Everyone experiences stress: people, dogs, cats.

An organism reacts to a threat and focuses their energies on coping with that threat.

What happens when an organism is stressed?

- “Stress hormones” released
- Fight or flight
- Signs of stress
- Coping
- Exhaustion



Stress is
natural.

A certain
amount of
stress is
necessary.

Importance of recognizing stress in Pet V.I.P animals

- **Promotes good impression of animals and pet therapy**
- **Reduces risk and liability**
- **Ensures all parties benefiting from the visit**
- **Protects your animal**
- **Protects patients**
- **Ensures future visits**
- **Increases the bond between you and your pet**

Causes of Stress for Pet V.I.P. Dogs

- Handler is nervous
- Clients are nervous
- Health issues
- Sudden changes in lifestyle
- Lack of sleep/physical exhaustion
- Dog senses a threat
- Can't understand expectations

Causes of Stress for Pet V.I.P. Dogs

- Failure
- Harsh treatment
- Witnessing a trauma
- Over-stimulation/arousal
- Fundamentals are missing
- Lack of exercise
- Over-exposure to a negative experience

Causes of Stress for Pet V.I.P. Dogs

- Crowding around animal
- Patient moves in an odd way
- Patient's emotional response
- Facility Energy level: heightened staff activity



Causes of Stress for Pet V.I.P. Dogs

- Aversive smells/new smells
- Slippery floors
- Loud or new sounds
- Sliding doors/elevators/stairs
- Gurneys, wheelchairs, walkers, etc.
- Wound dressings or unusual appearances
- Extreme temperatures

Causes of Stress for Pet V.I.P. Dogs

- Something unique to your dog?
- Overly high expectations

Signs of stress in dogs

- Rapid heart rate
- Panting
- Dilated pupils
- Extra energy, arousal
- Dog shuts down
- Won't drink or excessive drinking



Signs of stress in dogs

- Defecating
- Pacing
- Shaking
- Runny nose or bubbles on chin
- Whining/yelping/barking
- Tense body
- Biting leash

Signs of stress in dogs

- Sweaty paws
- Eats food too rapidly or won't eat at all
- Excessive or exaggerated self-grooming
- Poor concentration/forgetfulness
- A variety of smells
- Restless
- Uses calming signals

Signs of stress in dogs

- Digestive Disorders
- Won't make eye contact
- Shedding
- Whites of the eyes show
- Staring
- Flickering eyes
- Overly passive behavior

Signs of stress in dogs

- Behaviors unique to your dog

Long term effects of stress

- Burnout
- Poor performance
- Health problems
- Loses ability to do therapy work



Your roles

- Prevent stress
- Decrease effect of stressors
- Help animal recover from stress
- Evaluate!!!

Preventing stress

- Choose suitable environment
- Ask questions (our "rookie mistake")
- Make sure you and animal are prepared
- Training/practice/socialization
- Don't overwork the animal
- Schedule vacations from visits
- Keep pet healthy

Reducing stress

- Monitor animal at all times
- Take breaks
- Develop bond with animal to better keep communication during times of stress
- Avoid over-correction
- Redirection

Reducing stress

- Continue training with dog
- Employ relaxation techniques
- Be confident
- Rest and recovery from outside stressors
- Monitor your stress levels
- Learn from other teams
- Use animal's strengths

Reducing stress

- Exercise
- "Our time"
- Shake and stretch, etc.
- Massage
- Deep breathing
- Add familiar things
- Play (for some dogs)

Jean Donaldson's advice

- Food
- Access to other dogs
- Access to outdoors and interesting smells
- Attention from people and access to people, especially after isolation periods
- Initiation of play



What not to do

- Denial
- Flooding
- Negative or harsh training methods
- Fear of speaking up
- Rushing the process