

Fear Free for the 5 Senses

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Introduction

Fear has lasting negative effects on the brain, especially in social species like pets. Reducing fear isn't optional, it's essential to long-term health and behavior.

- Fear, anxiety, and stress (FAS) cause permanent harm
- Emotional wellbeing is just as important as physical health
- Veterinary care must address both mind and body

Fear Free Mission & Foundation

Fear Free aims to reduce FAS in pets while educating caregivers and veterinary teams. Better emotional care improves outcomes for pets, clients, and staff.

- Focus: alleviate fear, anxiety, stress
- Tools include:
 - Education (online + in-person CE)
 - Protocols and guidelines
- Benefits extend to:
 - Patients
 - Clients
 - Veterinary teams

Why Fear Free Matters

Lowering FAS improves safety, efficiency, and relationships. Fear Free creates better medicine AND better business.

- More cooperative patients → safer handling
- Stronger client trust and retention
- Increased job satisfaction for staff
- Clients actively seek Fear Free professionals

Personal Impact (“Find Your Why”)

Fear Free improves experiences for both pets and people. Emotional stress affects everyone in the clinic.

- Stress is shared between:
 - Patients

- Clients
- Veterinary staff
- Fear Free strengthens the human-animal bond
- Creates a safer, calmer environment

Cornerstones of Fear Free

Success relies on communication, awareness, and gentle handling. Prevention of FAS is the priority.

- Core principles:
 - Recognize FAS early
 - Communicate clearly (team + client + patient)
 - Considerate Approach (CA)
 - Gentle Control (GC)

Adjusting Care to Reduce FAS

Care must be tailored to each patient's stress signals. Proactive planning reduces fear before it escalates.

- Create individualized patient plans
- Build a Fear Free environment clinic-wide
- Recognize species-specific stress signals
- Improve:
 - Transport experience
 - Waiting room setup

Communication is Everything

Understanding animal body language is critical. Your behavior directly affects the patient.

- Watch body language to assess emotional state
- Calm team = calmer patient
- Use visuals (infographics) to educate clients
- Start Fear Free practices at home

Understanding Stress & FAS

Stress exists on a spectrum and becomes harmful when prolonged. Not all stress is bad, but unmanaged FAS is.

- Stress = disruption of normal function

- Short-term stress can be okay
- Chronic FAS → harmful to health
- Always assume FAS is present on a continuum

Canine Body Language

Dogs show clear differences between relaxed and stressed states. Early signs prevent escalation.

- Relaxed dog:
 - Soft face, normal pupils, relaxed tail
- Stressed dog:
 - Dilated pupils, tense face, lowered body
- Aggression ladder:
 - Subtle signals → avoidance → growling → biting

Feline Body Language

Cats escalate extremely quickly, often in seconds. Early detection is critical.

- Relaxed cat:
 - Soft face, forward ears, relaxed posture
- Stressed cat:
 - Dilated pupils, crouching, hissing, biting
- Escalation can occur in 0.1 seconds!

Considerate Approach & Gentle Control

Foundation of safe, compassionate handling. Minimize stress through environment and technique.

- Considerate Approach = environment + interactions
- Gentle Control = safe, low-stress restraint
- Factors influencing FAS:
 - Patient
 - Environment
 - Client
 - Veterinary team

The 5 Senses Framework

Evaluate all experiences through the senses. Small sensory changes create big impacts.

- Sight
- Touch
- Taste
- Smell
- Sound
- ⚠️ Strategies often overlap across senses

Sight

Visual stimuli influence stress levels. Create calm environments.

- Dogs: ~20/75 vision
- Cats: ~20/200 vision
 - Cats have wider visual fields
- Block view of other animals
 - Use curtains/towels
- Neutral colors
- Hide tools
- Provide hiding spaces

Touch

Handling style impacts comfort. Use consistent, gentle contact.

- Use Touch Gradient
- Provide traction surfaces
- Slow movements
- Use towels instead of muzzles
- Adjust your position

Taste

Food reduces stress effectively. Use high-value rewards.

- Reward ladder: kibble → cheese → whipped cream
- Warm food increases appeal
- Stinkier is better
- Avoid regular diets
- Toys as alternatives

Smell

Highly sensitive sense. Avoid strong odors.

- 1,000–10,000,000x stronger than humans
- Avoid perfumes/cleaners
- Use pheromones (Feliway, Adaptil/Thunderease)
- Use scents such as Catnip and lavender

Sound

Noise affects stress. Keep environment quiet.

- Reduce alarms and shouting
- Use calm voices
- White noise and music
- Relaxing rhythms help

Ideal Fear Free Environment

Environment mimics home comfort. Design directly impacts behavior.

- Neutral colors
- Non-slip surfaces
- High-value rewards
- Separate resources
- Toys
- Vertical space
- Pheromones

Wants vs Needs

Prioritize essential care. Stress defines limits.

- Define needs vs wants
- Adjust based on FAS
- Medicate when needed

Pre-Visit Pharmaceuticals

Reduce stress proactively. Prevention is better than reaction.

- Used for stressed patients
 - Gabapentin, Trazodone
 - Zylkene, Solliquin
- Combine with treats, toys, and other high value items

Communication with Clients

Clients are our partners. Client education and communication builds success.

- Explain FAS
- Prepare owners
- Show compassion, confidence, competence

Final Message

Fear Free is built on communication, compassion, and teamwork ensures success.

- Understand pet communication
- Engage in strong team-client communication
- Create low-stress environments



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