



As veterinary professionals, we need to use words that make our explanations clear and concise and show our clients that we're here to support them. The words we use not only help us convey the value of our recommendations – they also make it more likely that the pet owner will understand and accept them.

As you watch how dental disease is discussed in this example, pay special attention to the words used – the words that work – to help communicate more effectively. Use the video and the script provided as a guide for your own discussions with pet owners.

Veterinarian Client

As I mentioned during Monkey's physical, if you look here, you can see that his teeth are beginning to get a buildup of tartar and his gums are starting to become inflamed. Can you see that from where you are?

Yes.

Let's compare his teeth to this chart. This level of tartar and inflammation is about stage 2 periodontal disease. Are you familiar with periodontal disease or disease of the gums?

No.

Not many people are. It sounds scary, but the good news is that it's treatable. Periodontal disease is caused by a buildup of bacteria affecting the bone and tissues inside Monkey's mouth. You've probably heard of gingivitis – this is an example of periodontal disease.

Okay.

Do you have questions?

What can we do about it? Can we brush his teeth?

COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES

- Address the pet by name
- Use pictures or models to explain complex messages
- Provide support; use phrases such as "It's treatable" and "You're not alone"
- Address client concerns
- Invite questions
- Ensure that the client understands

■ Veterinarian ■ Client

Brushing is a great way to help keep teeth clean, but unfortunately Monkey's dental disease is more advanced, so brushing won't help at this point. In fact, it could be painful to his sore gums. At this stage, Monkey needs a dental cleaning under general anesthesia so that we can scrape off the tartar, clean under his gums, and polish his teeth.

This will help bring Monkey's teeth back to good health.

Is Monkey going to be okay?

I can see you're concerned. Please know that we'll take great care of Monkey. Dental cleaning is really the best option for him at this stage. My concern with not doing anything is that his dental disease will progress and could lead to things like tooth loss, pain, and infection.

I have a handout about dental disease that you can take with you so you can read it at home and have time to process all this information. Before I get it, what questions do you have?

Will it be expensive? I don't know if we can afford it.

Let me get you the handout, then we can go over the costs and the steps involved with a dental cleaning together before we arrive at a final decision. I want you to have all of the information you need to make the best decision for Monkey and your family.

I just want what's best for Monkey.

Please try not to worry about Monkey's mouth. You did the right thing by bringing Monkey in today for his annual checkup – thanks to you, we caught this before it progressed further. After Monkey's cleaning, we have lots of options to help keep his teeth clean and healthy, like brushing with chicken-flavored toothpaste or using a food that helps keep the teeth clean. We'll help you figure out which products will work best for you and Monkey.

Okay. Thank you.

COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES

- Provide information slowly; take pauses
- Involve the client

- Be supportive
- Empathize
- Address concerns
- Provide information slowly; take pauses

- Provide take-home information

- Involve the client in the decision-making process

- Reassure the client
- Recognize the client's efforts
- Ensure that the client is comfortable with decisions
- Make clear recommendations for preventive care

Veterinarian Client

Do you have any other questions before I have my assistant come in?

No.

The words we use, and how we use them, will build a strong foundation and level of trust that we need with clients to provide the best care for their pets.

The script for this video is available from the Partners for Healthy Pets website and is provided as a guide to help you use Words That Work.

COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES

- **Invite questions**