

HISTORY & RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING VIDEO SCRIPT



It has been said in human medicine that the medical interview is the foundation of patient care and a clinician's most important activity. Why wouldn't the same be true for veterinary medicine? Research shows that in both human and veterinary medicine, improving the relationship you have with clients is directly linked to improved medical outcomes. In fact, it may be the MOST important thing you can do for your patients.

The purpose of this video is to demonstrate some specific communication techniques you can use to help build better relationships with your clients – starting with the patient history.

Like you, I've taken thousands of patients' histories. We all go through the process of gathering information from our clients every day. In this video, you will see communication techniques that can make our conversations more effective. The more we understand about pet owners, the more we can help them understand the value of what we're doing and the more likely they are to provide their pet with the care you recommend.

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

■ Veterinarian ■ Client

Hi, Mr. Smith. I'm Dr. Ruth. And this must be Floyd.

Yes.

It's nice to meet you both. I see it's your first time here. Thank you for coming in and bringing Floyd to see us. We'd be happy to give you a tour at the end of the exam if you have time.

Thanks! That sounds great.

Absolutely. So you're here for Floyd's annual health exam today. I see that you've filled out our medical history form – thank you. It looks like everything has been routine and he hasn't had any medical problems. Do you have specific questions or concerns you want to discuss today?

COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES

- Introduce yourself
- Address the client and pet by name
- Thank the client for bringing their pet to see you
- Confirm the reason for the visit
- Explore for client concerns
- Maintain good eye contact throughout

■ Veterinarian ■ Client

No. Things have been really good with Floyd. Well, mostly good... it might be nothing, but he hasn't been eating quite the same lately.

Okay. That's good to know, and thank you for bringing it to my attention. You know Floyd better than anyone. If you're concerned, then I'm concerned too, and we'll try to figure out what could be causing the change.

Since this is Floyd's first visit, I'd like to take some time to learn more about Floyd and your family. Tell me a bit about him?

Sure. He's a really well-behaved and loving dog. We've had him since he was a puppy. He's an important part of our family, especially for our daughter.

Wonderful! Now, I'd just like to take some time to explore Floyd's day-to-day activities – we want to make sure his current vaccine and parasite control programs are still the best fit for him. We will also talk more about his change in appetite.

Okay.

So, tell me about Floyd's day-to-day activities – starting from first thing in the morning right through to the end of the day.

Well, my wife gets up early and takes Floyd for a quick walk on the trails behind our home. Then she gives him breakfast. Before I leave for work, I put Floyd in his outdoor kennel. When we get home, my daughter usually takes Floyd for another walk, where he gets to play with other dogs. After we feed Floyd his dinner, he usually just hangs out with my daughter while she does her homework.

It sounds as though your daughter plays a big role in Floyd's life.

How old is she?

She's 10. We all love Floyd, but especially my daughter.

COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES

- Listen to and acknowledge client concerns
- Use collaborative words, such as "we" and "let's"
- Invite the client to share their story

- Set an agenda for the visit

- Use open-ended questions to explore specific areas of the history

- Allow the client to feel heard – show reflective listening
- Gather specific details using focused, closed-ended questions

■ Veterinarian ■ Client

I have a 5-year-old, so I know how energetic kids can be. How's Floyd handling all of the exercise?

He's been doing very well and staying fairly active. He really likes the trails behind our new home.

Have you noticed any changes in his activity level?

No.

Okay. Now, let's talk about Floyd's behavior. I see you've filled out the behavior assessment form. Do you have any concerns?

No concerns – Floyd is the best-mannered dog we've ever had. My daughter spent a lot of time with Floyd, taking him to puppy socialization and obedience classes.

That's great. You're clearly doing a great job taking care of Floyd.

I have a few more questions I'd like to ask you. You mentioned that you feed him twice a day – tell me about everything Floyd eats in a day.

Well, he gets kibble for breakfast and dinner. He also gets a couple of dog biscuits throughout the day.

Tell me more about his kibble.

I get it from the grocery store – I can't remember the name of it, but it comes in a blue bag. We give him what the bag says – about 1 cup a day.

What about treats?

I really try not to give him treats besides a couple of biscuits for going in his kennel, but I'm pretty sure my daughter and wife slip him extra snacks from time to time.

You mentioned that there has been a change to Floyd's appetite in the past couple of weeks?

COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES

- Use open-ended questions to gather additional information
- Gather specific details using focused, closed-ended questions
- Clearly verbalize transition to new topics
- Explore any uncovered areas
- Praise the client's efforts
- Allow the client to feel heard – show reflective listening
- Use open-ended encouragers, such as "Tell me more"
- Allow the client to feel heard – show reflective listening

■ Veterinarian ■ Client

Yes. He seems to be less interested in his kibble and doesn't always finish the bowl. Maybe that's just because of the extra treats he's been getting.

Okay. Well, we will learn more from his physical exam. I know it can be a challenge when everyone wants to reward Floyd with treats.

Let me make a note of it here in Floyd's record.

Okay.

Just to make sure I'm not missing anything: Floyd gets kibble twice a day, morning and night. He also gets a couple of biscuits when you put him in his kennel. It sounds like you really try to limit his treats, but that your wife and daughter slip him snacks from time to time. Have I missed anything, or is there anything else you think is important for me to know?

No. I think that's everything.

After we've done his physical exam, let's chat more about the dog treats and see what other healthier options there are for Floyd.

Sure. That sounds good.

Let's move on to the physical exam now to have a closer look.

Floyd, I haven't forgotten you – it's your turn now.

COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES

- Empathize with the client
- Acknowledge the client's concerns

- Summarize information to ensure that it is correct
- Invite the client to offer further details

- Outline a plan for addressing the client's concern

- Clearly verbalize transition to physical exam

- Acknowledge the pet directly

By nature, we as veterinarians are empathetic – we love animals. But it can sometimes be challenging to convey that empathy verbally to our clients. We need to show them that we care because clients are more likely to accept our recommendations when we share a trusting connection. It goes back to that old adage: Clients need to know how much you care before they care how much you know.

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.