WORDS THAT WORK SERIES NUTRITION VIDEO SCRIPT

Pet obesity can be a touchy subject, but it's an important one to address with pet owners. We need them to see our genuine concern for their pet's health – and we can do this by choosing the right words. At the same time, we need to advocate for better pet nutrition, while guiding clients toward healthy lifestyle changes for their pets. Remember to be encouraging and supportive so your clients have fun while their pets become healthier!

In this example, watch how the patient's weight issue is addressed with the client. The words used in this video help show empathy and help build a level of trust with the client in order to communicate effectively. Use this video and the script provided as a guide for your own discussions with pet owners.

Veterinarian Client

Peepers is adorable. From our physical exam, she appears to be doing well. That said, I'm a bit concerned about Peepers' weight. Are you okay talking about her weight?

Yes.

Pets hide weight well, and it can be hard to tell when they are overweight. If you feel here, we should be able to feel the top of the spine but not see it. And, if you feel here, we should be able to easily feel her ribs, but again, we don't want to see them.

It is difficult for us to feel the top of Peepers' spine and her ribs. This tells us that Peepers has gained more weight than we'd like to see on her.

Okay.

Let's compare Peepers to this chart showing different body conditions. Where do you think Peepers falls on this chart?

I would say she's similar to this one.

Techniques

COMMUNICATION

• Invite the client to participate in the exam

- Use pictures, models, or diagrams to help explain complex messages
- Ask for the client's perspective



Veterinarian

I agree. She's a 4 out of 5. The reason I point this out is because obesity in animals, just like humans, is a concern. Obesity can lead to diseases like arthritis and even heart disease.

So let's figure out what may be contributing to her weight gain, okay?

Okay.

You mentioned earlier that your family has been giving Peepers extra snacks, but there are other factors that can also cause weight gain – not enough exercise or a medical issue. Given Peepers' young age, a medical issue is less likely, so why don't we start with her diet and activity level. Does this sound okay?

Sure – I know we could be doing a better job on the treats – but I'm not sure we have the time to give her more exercise.

I can appreciate that finding extra time can be difficult these days – so let's start with her diet – any questions or concerns about her diet?

No.

You mentioned that Peepers is eating twice a day, and you said she gets about 1/2 cup each time. Do you mind if I ask what you are using for a cup to measure her food?

We're using an old plastic measuring cup.

Great, that helps us know how much she's getting. Since we want Peepers to lose weight, I recommend we switch Peepers to a weightreduction food.

This will help her lose her extra weight and reduce her risk for arthritis and heart disease but still give her all the nutrients she needs. Once she's down to her ideal weight, we can revisit her diet and discuss adjusting how much she gets a day to keep her at a stable weight.

What about treats? I don't want to cut out Peepers' treats.

I understand treats are an important part of your family's relationship with Peepers. Unfortunately, these have calories that add up quickly. Since you think it is not realistic to cut out treats, we should work on

COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES

- Provide information slowly; take pauses
- Explain concerns
- Use collaborative words, such as "let's" and "we"
- Use reflective listening

- Be supportive
- Empathize
- Address concerns
- Encourage questions

- Recognize the client's efforts
- Make clear recommendations
- Promote preventive care
- Provide information slowly; take pauses

Veterinarian

limiting the number she's getting or find a replacement like switching to fruit or veggie treats. This way, you can still give her treats while keeping Peepers at a healthy weight.

We can give it a shot – I don't know if Peepers is going to go for a carrot! And I know my wife and sons love watching Peepers' reaction when they give her a treat.

I can tell that Peepers is important to your family. You can ensure your wife and sons that Peepers knows how much you love her by the attention she gets – not by the treats. I would be happy to put together an information package for your family on healthy food options and why we are recommending them.

Okay – we'll take a look at it tonight.

What other questions do you have about Peepers' diet before we move on?

None. I think that's good for now.

If your wife or sons have questions when you get home, please don't hesitate to give us a call.

Thanks!

One last thing before we move on – I know you mentioned it would be hard to change Peepers' current activity level, but if you can get her out walking or running more, any increase in exercise will help – even 5 minutes a day.

We can give it a shot, but no promises.

That would be great if you could try. If what we're doing isn't having any effect, we will need to revisit our plan. On that note, I'd like to see Peepers back in 4 weeks to be weighed again. I would expect to see some change in her weight by then if our plan is working – ultimately, her goal weight is 15 lb. Would it be possible to bring her back in 4 weeks to be weighed?

That should work. I'm off on Fridays, so I could swing by then.

COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES

- Explain concerns clearly
- Use collaborative words, such as "let's" and "we"
- Recognize the client's efforts
- Address concerns
- Offer take-home information
- Encourage questions
- Offer additional support

- Make clear recommendations
- Explain the benefits of preventive care
- Make clear recommendations

Veterinarian Client

Great. If you have any questions or run into problems in the meantime, please don't hesitate to give us a call.

When you bring Peepers back, we just need to get a weight on her – it shouldn't take more than a few minutes. If you or I have any concerns following her weight check-in, we can follow up by phone or email. And, if we feel we need to schedule another visit in person, we'll do that. How does that sound?

Okay. Let's do that.

COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES

- Make a clear plan of next steps
- Be respectful of the client's schedule

This video has demonstrated some specific communication techniques you can use to help build better relationships with your clients.

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.