

# Aggression at the Vet



If your dog snaps, snarls, or growls at the vet, you're not alone- and we can help.

**everydog**  
BEHAVIOR TRAINING

The veterinary clinic can be a very stressful place for many dogs. There are new people and dogs, lots of weird smells, and often get poked with needles! Plus, they often only go once a year which means it's difficult to make a positive change. But if your dog has shown aggressive behavior at the vet, there are ways to make things better in the future.

## Advocating for Your Dog

Get to know your dog's [body language](#)! Before they get to snarling or snapping, do their hackles up? Do they try to hide? Do they start licking their lips or looking away from the new scary person?

Monitor your dog for these signs and get comfortable telling vet clinic staff to STOP when you see your dog becoming more stressed. Unless it is a true emergency, it's usually best to stop and try something different instead of pushing your dog past their limit.

Feeling unsure about saying something when your dog is stressed? Check out Fear Free vets!

Advocacy for your dog's comfort can start before you're in the vet office! Call ahead, make staff aware of your dog's behavior, and state that your dog will wait in the car until the vet team is ready for them. This will minimize the stress of waiting in the lobby.

## Pre-Visit Pharmaceuticals (PVPs)

When dogs are stressed at the vet, our first line of defense is to use medications to help them feel safer and less anxious. Pre-Visit Pharmaceuticals (or PVPs) are short-acting medications (usually lasting 6-12 hours) and can be prescribed by any veterinarian. These medications reduce fear and anxiety, and may also make your pet somewhat sleepy- helping them get through the veterinary visit with less stress (and less aggression!).

Tips for using PVPs:

- Take the full amount recommended by your vet! A lower dose is unlikely to give your dog the help they need to be more relaxed at the vet.
- Test out your PVPs on a normal day to see how your dog responds and look for any side effects. You may notice them being very sleepy- that's normal!
- Give your PVPs 2-3 hours prior to the vet visit so the meds are at their strongest when you get to the clinic.
- Don't wait- PVPs should be the first thing you do to help your dog at the vet- not the last!
- It may be odd to see your pet in a more sedated state, but sleepy is better than a panic attack. Remember, they only have to get this sleepy a few times a year for vet visits. That's worth it!



## Muzzle Training

For dogs who show aggression at the vet, muzzle training is a wonderful skill! Taught separately, dogs can actually learn to LOVE their muzzles- and keep everyone safe.

It's essential to find a [correctly-fitted basket muzzle](#) that allows your dog to fully open their mouth to pant, drink water, and take treats. Smaller muzzles may hold your dog's mouth closed, which will add stress and make it hard for them to breathe or cool down through panting.

Use a [positive reinforcement](#) process to teach your dog that the muzzle is a great thing, and have them wear it regularly when doing fun activities. That way the muzzle doesn't predict going to the vet.

## Happy Visits

In some cases doing a "Happy Visit" can be a great way to help them love the vet again. If your dog is highly stressed and reactive at the vet, these visits may not be the best step for you. During Happy Visits, you visit the vet with your dog on a day that's quiet and when your dog doesn't need any care. They just come in, explore, and get lots of treats from you. This helps them see that the vet is a safe place!

## Sedation

In some cases, PVPs and advocating just aren't enough. Some dogs are essentially having a panic attack when they're at the vet, and no amount of anxiety medication or training will help. For these situations, especially when there are urgent procedures to complete, full sedation may be the best option.

In this scenario we're using PVPs and other strategies only until we can inject a sedative- then your dog takes a nap while the clinic team can get them vaccinated, x-rayed, or whatever else needs to be done. Once your dog is done, the sedation is reversed.

While this can feel like a last resort, it doesn't have to be! If you've tried vet visits several times at your maximum dose of PVPs, it may be a good time for sedated visits.

## Cooperative Care

"Cooperative Care" is all about training your dog to participate in their own vet visits. We can train them to get on the scale, or to stand still for ear drops, or for many other procedures. While this can take time, it's a great option for dogs who will need consistent veterinary care or families who enjoy training new skills and tricks. Fun fact: Cooperative Care is how zoos do most veterinary tasks for animals like lions and orcas!

If you need help with cooperative care, reach out to a certified behavior consultant!