

PROTOCOL FOR ASSESSING PAIN AND STRESS IN DOGS

The tables contained in this handout were developed by veterinarians to assess pain and stress in dogs. These conditions may not be independent. Some behavioral complaints are the result of stress and/or pain, or may cause more stress and/or pain.

By using these scales, which are used in hospital and shelter settings, clients can evaluate their dogs when they first have a concern and seek help, and then repeatedly evaluate the dogs using the same scales during treatment. Treating behavioral problems is a process, so it is very useful to have a series of objective measures that can be evaluated repeatedly on a regular basis over time.

For clients whose dogs are not yet having problems, these scales can and should be used to evaluate all household dogs once or twice a year, and when anyone in the household dies or there are any additions to the household. Any changes or concerns should be discussed with your veterinarian.

There are four scales relevant to all dogs, and three additional scales that pertain only to certain situations (blood drawing, imaging, nail trimming). Clients may benefit from assessing their dogs during veterinary procedures. The clients' observations may help their vet to address fear as it appears, and may help protect the dog from becoming worse when repeatedly undergoing a set of procedures. Use of such scales is in keeping with meeting the dog's cognitive and behavioral needs while delivering the most humane care possible.

By recording the dog's responses at each visit, veterinarians and clients can detect changes in the dog's behavior, which will be relevant to ensure that the dog receives the best care.

The total score possible for scales one to four is 51. Dogs with a zero score are happy to go to the vet. Dogs with high scores likely need help.

Clinic Dog Stress Scale 1: Entry to the Clinic

Dog's behavior upon entering the veterinary practice and in the waiting room (this section can be completed by a member of the reception staff). A total of 5 points are possible. Dogs with a score of 5 are distressed and need help. Dogs with zero scores are calm.

Stress Level	Dog's Behavior/Demeanor
0	Extremely friendly, outgoing, solicitous of attention
1	Calm, relaxed, seemingly unmoved
2	Alert, but calm and cooperative
3	Tense, but cooperative, panting slowly, not very relaxed but can still be easily led on lead
4	Very tense, anxious, may be shaking or whining, will not sit or lie down if exposed (may do so behind owners' legs), panting, difficult to maneuver on lead
5	Extremely stressed, barking/howling, tries to hide, needs to be lifted up or forced to move

Clinic Dog Stress Scale 2: Weighing the Dog

Dog's behavior upon being weighed (this section can be completed by the veterinary nurse or technician who weighs the dog). A total of 5 points are possible. Dogs with a score of 5 are distressed and need help. Dogs with zero scores are calm.

Stress Level	Dog's Behavior/Demeanor
0	Extremely friendly, outgoing, solicitous of attention, eagerly gets onto scale
1	Calm, relaxed, seemingly unmoved, and walks easily onto scale and sits
2	Alert, but calm and cooperative, can get onto scale but not sit on it
3	Tense, but cooperative, panting slowly, not very relaxed but can still be easily led on lead, gets onto scale only with encouragement
4	Very tense, anxious, may be shaking or whining, will not sit or lie down if exposed (may do so behind owners' legs), panting, difficult to maneuver on lead, must be helped/encouraged to get on or stay on scale for 10 seconds to get reading
5	Extremely stressed, barking/howling, tries to hide, needs to be lifted up or forced to get onto or stay on scale for 10 seconds to get reading

Clinic Dog Stress Scale 3: Entering the Exam Room

Dog's behavior upon being brought into the exam room (this can be completed by whomever guides the client and dog to the room). A total of 5 points are possible. Dogs with a score of 5 are distressed and need help. Dogs with zero scores are calm.

Stress Level	Dog's Behavior/Demeanor
0	Extremely friendly, outgoing, solicitous of attention
1	Calm, relaxed, seemingly unmoved
2	Alert, but calm and cooperative
3	Tense, but cooperative, panting slowly, not very relaxed but can still be easily led on lead
4	Very tense, anxious, may be shaking or whining, will not sit or lie down if exposed (may do so behind owners' legs), panting, difficult to maneuver on lead, avoids room
5	Extremely stressed, barking/howling, tries to hide, needs to be lifted up or forced to move into room

Clinic Dog Stress Scale 4: Examining the Dog

Dog's behavior upon examination (this chart can be completed by the veterinary nurse or technician, and if needed, in consultation with the veterinarian). This chart evaluates body regions that are involved in the stress response. Having as much information as possible enables the veterinary staff to suggest

interventions and to use the behaviors noted to assess improvement or debility. Rather than trying to remember if the dog is "worse" or "better" than at previous visits, this tick sheet allows the veterinary team to collect actual data and to use it to improve the quality of the dog's and client's experience. A total of 36 points are possible. Dogs with high scores are showing signs of stress and may be distressed. Dogs with low scores may be less distressed. Dogs with zero scores are calm.

Stress Level	Body Posture	Tail Posture	Ear Posture	Gaze	Pupils	Respirations	Lips	Activity*	Vocalization
0	Relaxed and moves on own	At rest for that breed or high	High and softly forward	Will look steadily at vet	Normal response to light	Normal—jaw relaxed	Relaxed	Flexible	None
1	Tense—can manipulate	Lower than at rest but not down	Moving back a bit	Looks only intermittently at vet	Normal to slight dilated	Normal—jaw tense	Firm	Inactive	Whine, cry
2	Rigid—hard to manipulate and a bit lower	Completely down	Fully back	Will not look at vet but scans room	Dilated, large amount of iris	Panting—dry	Licking lips	Paws flexed, may tremble	Whimper
3	Hunched—hard to see or examine belly and low posture	Tucked between legs	Ears back and down	Not scanning, looking steadily at distance or owner	Dilated, small amount of iris	Panting—dripping	Yawning and licking	Periodic trembling	Snarl, snap
4	Curled—completely withdrawn and belly maximally tucked	Clamped hard up to belly	As low and back as is possible	Staring fixedly and steadily at immediate fore-distance	Completely dilated—no iris	Profound panting, salivating, gasping		Uncontrollable trembling	Bite

*Note if urinates, defecates, or releases anal sacs at any point.

Clinic Dog Stress Scale 5: Taking Blood from the Dog

This scale will only be used if blood is taken. The circumstance under which blood is taken should be noted below.

1. Laboratory evaluation: routine or because dog is ill? (circle one)
2. Tourniquet used? Y/N (circle one)
3. Vein from which blood was taken: _____

4. Restraint level: (circle one)
 - a. None—dog sat still and butterfly catheter with digital pressure used
 - b. Mild—vein held off manually
 - c. Moderate—dog gently and minimally restrained physically while vein held off
 - d. Severe—dog held down and restraint great

Stress Level	Body Posture	Respirations	Lips	Body Activity*	Forearm	Vocalization
0	Relaxed and moves on own	Normal—jaw relaxed	Relaxed	Flexible	Allows vet to pick up feet and forearm; forearm not stiff	None
1	Tense—can manipulate	Normal—jaw tense	Firm	Inactive	Allows vet to pick up feet and forearm; forearm stiff	Whine, cry
2	Rigid—hard to manipulate and a bit lower	Panting—dry	Licking lips	Paws flexed, may tremble	Allows touch but tries to withdraw forearm or body	Whimper
3	Hunched—hard to see or examine belly and low posture	Panting—dripping	Yawning and licking	Periodic trembling	Avoids all touch and needs leg held still	Snarl, snap
4	Curled—completely withdrawn and belly maximally tucked	Profound panting, salivating, gasping		Uncontrollable trembling	Avoids all touch and needs leg and body held still	Bite

*Note if urinates, defecates, or releases anal sacs at any point.

Clinic Dog Stress Scale 6: Radiographing or Ultrasounding the Dog

Stress Level	Body Posture	Respirations	Lips	Body Activity*	Body	Vocalization
0	Relaxed and moves on own	Normal—jaw relaxed	Relaxed	Flexible	Allows vet to place as needed and remains loose and pliant	None
1	Tense—can manipulate	Normal—jaw tense	Firm	Inactive	Allows vet to place as needed but is stiff	Whine, cry
2	Rigid—hard to manipulate and a bit lower	Panting—dry	Licking lips	Paws flexed, may tremble	Allows vet to place by stretching out or manipulating areas and is rigid	Whimper
3	Hunched—hard to see or examine belly and low posture	Panting—dripping	Yawning and licking	Periodic trembling	Avoids manipulations by moving and stiffening, needs some restraint	Snarl, snap
4	Curled—completely withdrawn and belly maximally tucked	Profound panting, salivating, gasping		Uncontrollable trembling	Not possible to do without stretching and controlling head and legs	Bite

*Note if urinates, defecates, or releases anal sacs at any point.

Clinic Dog Stress Scale 7: Trimming the Dog's Nails

Stress Level	Body Posture	Respirations	Lips	Body Activity*	Feet/legs	Vocalization
0	Relaxed and moves on own	Normal—jaw relaxed	Relaxed	Flexible	Allows vet to pick up feet and manipulate without resistance	None
1	Tense—can manipulate	Normal—jaw tense	Firm	Inactive	Allows vet to pick up feet, but stiff	Whine, cry
2	Rigid—hard to manipulate and a bit lower	Panting—dry	Licking lips	Paws flexed, may tremble	Allows touch to feet, but tries to withdraw them	Whimper
3	Hunched—hard to see or examine belly and low posture	Panting—dripping	Yawning and licking	Periodic trembling	Avoids all touch and needs foot/leg held	Snarl, snap
4	Curled—completely withdrawn and belly maximally tucked	Profound panting, salivating, gasping		Uncontrollable trembling	Avoids all touch and will not permit any access to feet without extreme restraint of body and feet	Bite

*Note if urinates, defecates, or releases anal sacs at any point.

The tables and scales used in this handout and the text were inspired by and/or adapted from: Döring D, Roscher A, Scheipl F, Kuchenhoff H, Erhard MH. Fear-related behavior of dogs in veterinary practice. *Vet J* 2009;182:38-43; Hellyer P, Rodan I, Brunt J, Downing R, Hagedorn JE, Robertson SA. AAHA/AAFP pain management guidelines for dogs and cats. *J Am Anim Hosp Assoc* 2007;43:235-248; and Hernander L. Factors influencing dogs' stress level in the waiting room at a veterinary clinic. *SLU Student report* 190, 2008; 29 pp; ISSN 1652-280X.