

COMMUNICATING WITH CLIENTS

Tips from the Language of Veterinary Care initiative



DOs

&



DON'Ts



AVMA'S LANGUAGE OF VETERINARY CARE INITIATIVE

explores how veterinary teams can harness language to improve patient care. It's based on research with pet owners across the United States. This desktop resource is just one of numerous tools available through the initiative.

Visit avma.org/LanguageOfCare for more practical resources and information.

The Language of Veterinary Care research and tools are made possible in part by educational funding from our partners CareCredit and Pets Best.

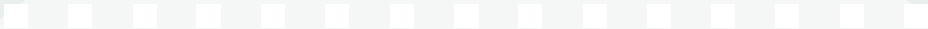


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Even pet owners who fundamentally value veterinary medicine may not schedule veterinary visits as frequently as they should. Which of these factors sometimes keeps them away?

- A** They think the veterinarian is just for emergencies and illnesses.
- B** They get services for their pet elsewhere.
- C** They're money conscious.
- D** All of the above





All of the above

Pet owners want to do what's best for their animals, but don't always bring them in for regular check-ups. Changing how we say things to clients can help them better understand the value of preventive care.

The best way to do this is by making veterinary care **PERSONAL** and helping them understand that wellness care **HELPS US BUILD RELATIONSHIPS** that result in better care for their pets.





TRUE

OR

FALSE



Research shows that pet owners value three main things when it comes to their veterinarian: expertise, a strong relationship, and personalized recommendations.






Pet owners understand that a strong and trusting relationship enables the veterinarian to provide better care and more customized recommendations in every area of their pet's care—from vaccines and medications to nutrition and behavior.

SAY THIS: “Regular check-ups help the whole veterinary team get to know you and your pet. They let us take time to build a strong and trusting relationship with you both.”





Which is **NOT** a statement that might help new pet owners establish good habits for their pet's veterinary care?

A

“Check off the boxes for important procedures, vaccines, and recommendations early in your pet's life.”

B

“Providing veterinary care is a responsibility that comes along with being a pet owner.”

C

“Bringing your puppy or kitten in for regular check-ups is the first step in building a strong relationship with your veterinarian.”

D

“A visit to the veterinarian is the best way to start your pet off on the right paw.”





B

“Providing veterinary care is a responsibility that comes along with being a pet owner.”

Focusing on veterinary care as a responsibility generally isn't an effective strategy because the reminder feels chastising to pet owners.

The best way in to a conversation about why to see a veterinarian is to focus on the owner's relationship with their pet. With new owners, focus on establishing their pet's early years as key to fostering a strong relationship.





TRUE

OR

FALSE



**Connecting regular
veterinary care to a
strong relationship
with the veterinarian
can help clients
recognize the value of
routine visits.**





Pet owners value a strong relationship with their veterinarian. Use language that shows how regular, routine check-ups can help strengthen that relationship.

SAY THIS: “Getting to know your pet now—while s/he is healthy—is important because that familiarity will help me provide better care down the road if something were to go wrong.”





Which is **NOT** an effective way to address owner concerns about cost of care?

- A** “I completely understand your financial concerns.”
- B** “If we can’t meet your budget, we’re always willing to refer you to a lower-cost clinic.”
- C** “We can work with you to explore a full range of flexible care and treatment options to fit your budget.”
- D** “We can look into flexible payment plans and insurance options.”





B

“If we can’t meet your budget, we’re always willing to refer you to a lower-cost clinic.”

Pet owners say that offering a referral to a lower-cost practice feels judgmental and off-putting, like the owner isn’t “good enough” for your practice. Pet owners value their relationship with us and prefer to work with us on alternative treatment options.

If a referral to a more affordable provider turns out to be the best end result, it’s important to make clients feel they’re not being judged.





A

“Veterinary care is one of the best ways to keep your pet healthy and happy for years to come.”

The best way to begin a conversation with clients about why to see a veterinarian is to focus on a pet owner’s relationship with their pet. Positive approaches work better than scare tactics.



What is NOT an effective strategy to communicate the value of veterinary care?

- A** Focus on your relationship with the owner and animal.
- B** Remind owners their animal can't communicate its needs and tends to hide illness.
- C** Give real-life examples of preventable illnesses.
- D** Explain the value of the veterinarian's education and credentials.





Explain the value of the veterinarian's education and credentials.

Pet owners know veterinarians go through many years of school, and they don't question our credentials. Focusing on our education not only is unnecessary, but also can leave clients wondering if we feel there's something we need to prove.



Research suggests that _____ pet owners are more likely to visit the veterinarian frequently.





New

New pet owners are more likely to visit the veterinarian frequently, so this is an excellent time to establish good habits when it comes to their pet's care.

SAY THIS: “A visit to the veterinarian is the best way to start your pet off on the right paw.”






TRUE

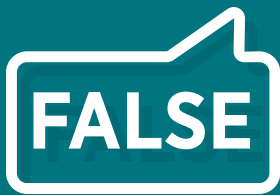
OR

FALSE



**Comparing pets
directly to humans
helps to show pet
owners how important
regular care is.**





Despite how much owners love their pets, they push back on parallels that suggest pets need the exact same care as a human family member. Instead of making direct comparisons, focus on positive outcomes of preventive care, like diseases that can be prevented and conditions that can be best treated or managed when caught early.

SAY THIS: “Pets require check-ups to get vaccines and prevent illness, and so you can ask your veterinarian questions about your pet’s health.”



What's the best term to use when talking about preventive care?

- A** Check-ups
- B** Visits
- C** Wellness visits
- D** Appointments





Check-ups

The term “check-ups” resonates most with pet owners. Owners say it feels all-encompassing and suggests they’ll leave the veterinarian feeling reassured about their pet’s health.






TRUE

OR

FALSE



**When it comes to
finances, veterinarians
should address the
elephant in the room –
cost of care – head-on.**






Owners appreciate when their veterinarian demonstrates understanding about cost of care and even voices a desire to help make veterinary care more affordable.

SAY THIS: “Veterinary care is expensive, and even the most loving of pet owners often have to make difficult decisions around what they can and can’t afford.”





Which is **NOT** an effective way to communicate with pet owners who haven't seen the veterinarian regularly?

A

“Whether you visited the veterinarian last month or last year, your veterinarian is able to meet you wherever you are.”

B

“Life happens. Maybe you moved to a new city or you recently had a baby. Whatever the reason, it's easy to forget that it's been a few years since your last visit to the veterinarian.”

C

“Veterinary medicine plays an important role at each stage of your pet's life.”

D

“Your veterinarian can help you get up to speed.”





B

“Life happens. Maybe you moved to a new city or you recently had a baby. Whatever the reason, it’s easy to forget that it’s been a few years since your last visit to the veterinarian.”

Pet owners don’t want their veterinarian to make assumptions about what’s kept them from regular veterinary visits. It can feel intrusive and “none of your business.” People also don’t like to be reminded that they haven’t been getting regular care for their pet.

Instead, reassure them it’s easy to pick back up if they haven’t been regular with visits, and let them know that the veterinarian is still able to meet them wherever they are.



Which strategy helps encourage pet owners to bring their animals in for regular veterinary care?

- A** Position the owner as their pet's advocate.
- B** Remind the owner that pets can't communicate about their health and sometimes hide illness.
- C** Connect preventive care with real-life positive outcomes, like preventable diseases.
- D** All of the above





All of the above

Focusing on the owner's relationship with their pet helps encourage them to choose more regular check-ups and preventive care. Providing recognizable examples of preventable conditions and encouraging owners to advocate for their pet's health can help you make the case for preventive care.

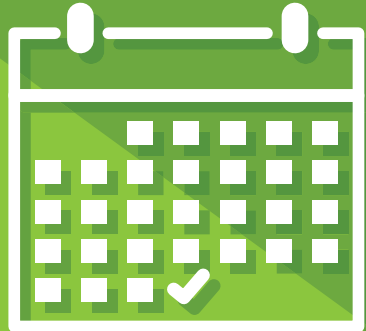
STRATEGIES TO AVOID:

- » Comparing pets directly to humans
- » Using statistics to try to drive urgency
- » Scare tactics



What's the best way to discuss frequency of visits with clients?

- A** Routine and regular
- B** Yearly
- C** Frequently



A

Routine and regular

Most pet owners (80%) chose the words “routine” and “regular” as the best way to promote regularity without being overbearing.

PRO TIP: Pet owners also prefer the term “check-ups” over “wellness visits,” or “appointments.” They describe this language as a hopeful way of conveying the importance of protecting their pet from problems down the road.






TRUE

OR

FALSE



Providing pet owners with various treatment options demonstrates that cost doesn't have to be prohibitive.






The availability of “options” conveys that veterinary care isn’t one-size-fits-all, and neither is cost. Use language that communicates that the veterinary team is on the pet owner’s side to explore financial options.

SAY THIS: “Everyone at our veterinary practice is committed to finding an option that works with you – so we can ensure cost doesn’t affect your pet’s care. And we can help you with payment options and other financial tools such as pet health insurance to afford veterinary care.”





Which is an effective way to highlight a veterinarian's expertise?

- A** “Veterinarians complete an average of 4 ½ years of undergraduate education—and then veterinary school is another 4 years.”
- B** “When it comes to your pet’s wellbeing, no one is more committed or better equipped than veterinarians.”
- C** “Only a veterinarian can provide science, research, and evidence-based guidance.”
- D** “Our veterinarians see and care for hundreds of pets of all shapes, sizes, types, and breeds each year.”






“Our veterinarians see and care for hundreds of pets of all shapes, sizes, types, and breeds each year.”

In a head-to-head comparison, pet owners agreed that it's experience, not education, that best measures a veterinarian's expertise. In particular, language that illustrates experience with different animals and conditions resonates.





Which is NOT an effective way to explain why regular veterinary care is needed?

- A** “Veterinary care is a responsibility that comes along with being a pet owner.”
- B** “The best veterinary care is personalized care. Once we have a relationship with your pet, our team can make specific recommendations that suit him/her.”
- C** “Your veterinarian is an invaluable source of information – even in areas beyond medical care. We can refer you to many other specialists and service providers that your pet might need or benefit from in the future.”
- D** “Getting to know what’s normal for your pet while it’s healthy can help me spot anything unusual before it potentially becomes a big problem.”





“Veterinary care is a responsibility that comes along with being a pet owner.”

Owners know intuitively that preventive care is best for their pets' long-term health. Focusing on veterinary care as a responsibility isn't effective because the owner feels chastised. When we focus on the relationship clients have with their pets, they're more likely to see value in wellness visits.





TRUE

OR

FALSE



**Using statistics can
be an effective
approach for
promoting regular care.**





Statistics can do more harm than good when making the case for preventive care, often reinforcing to pet owners they're not alone in infrequent visits. Provide recognizable examples of avoidable conditions, to help owners relate the benefits of preventive care to their own pet.

SAY THIS: "Taking these regular, preventive measures helps your pet avoid preventable illnesses like rabies, Lyme disease, and parasite infestations such as fleas, ticks, and worms."

NOT THIS: "17% of dog owners and 46% of cat owners don't visit the veterinarian even once a year."



Which statement most empowers pet owners to ask questions about the cost of veterinary care and possible treatment options.

- A** “Ask me any questions about the cost of care.”
- B** “Start conversations with your veterinarian about the cost of care.”
- C** “Speak up about the cost of care.”





**“Ask me any questions
about the cost of care.”**

This demonstrates that the veterinarian will partner with pet owners to find the best options. The other statements can feel intimidating and put the onus on the pet owner to ask about costs.

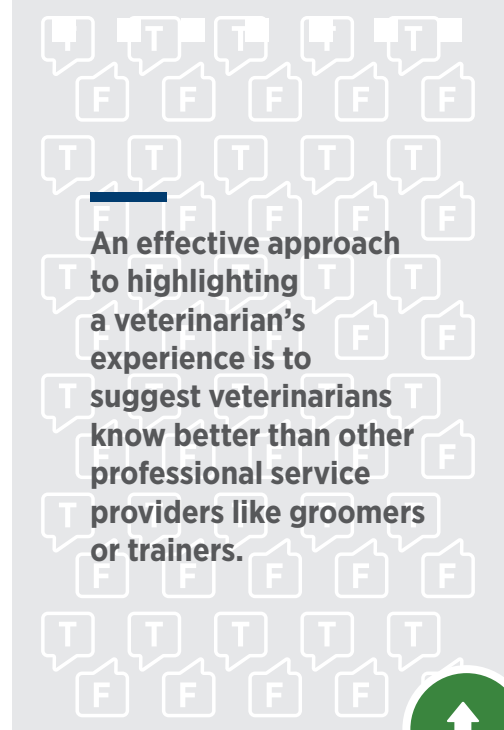




TRUE

OR

FALSE



An effective approach to highlighting a veterinarian's experience is to suggest veterinarians know better than other professional service providers like groomers or trainers.





The idea that only veterinarians are qualified to help is a turnoff. Pet owners feel that we're belittling the many other sources they trust. Owners see their veterinarian as one source of knowledge among many, with the owner ultimately making the final decision.

SAY THIS: “Your veterinarian is a valuable source of information and we can refer you to many other specialists and services in the area—such as trainers, groomers, and kennels—that your pet might need in the future.”



What do pet owners say is the most valuable thing a veterinarian provides?

- A** Customized advice
- B** Tailored guidance
- C** Personalized recommendations
- D** Answers that are right for you





Personalized recommendations

Of anything a veterinarian could offer, “personalized recommendations” stood out as the most valuable to pet owners.

SAY THIS: “Your veterinarian can provide personalized recommendations for anything related to your pet’s care—from vaccines and medications to nutrition and behavior.”






TRUE

OR

FALSE



Sometimes the best way to make pet owners understand the need for regular veterinary care is to scare them with worst-case scenarios.






Pet owners often have a negative response to words like “vulnerable” and “deadly” that threaten the worst case. Instead, try a more positive approach, like positioning pet owners as their pet’s advocate. This reminds clients of their responsibility without being overbearing.

SAY THIS: “It’s important to remember pets can’t communicate about their own health.”

NOT THIS: “Skipping visits to the veterinarian can leave your pet vulnerable.”





Pet owners like the idea that the veterinarian can provide “personalized recommendations” for their pet. Which of these is a prerequisite to provide credibility for this?

- A** Establishing the veterinarian’s academic credentials
- B** Showing that advice from other sources like the internet is flawed
- C** Establishing that the veterinarian will build a relationship with the pet and owner





Establishing that the veterinarian will build a relationship with the pet and owner

Establishing that the veterinarian will build a relationship makes it more credible to pet owners that he/she can then provide personalized recommendations.

SAY THIS: “Regular check-ups help us get to know you and your pet. They let us take time to build a strong relationship with you so we can make personalized recommendations for your pet’s care.”

NOT THIS: “Only a veterinarian can provide the guidance and support your pet needs to stay healthy.”





POP QUIZ

When discussing cost of care, be careful not to use language that clients might perceive as judgmental.

How can we frame the conversation to show clients we understand their concerns and want to help make sure their pets get the care they need?



SAY THIS:

“Everyone at the veterinary practice is committed to finding an option that works for you.”

This communicates that the veterinary team is on the pet owner’s side and cost shouldn’t prevent animals from getting the care they need.



The AVMA's Language that Works ebook provides specific examples of language that resonates with clients to answer which of these questions?

- A** Why should I take my pet to the veterinarian?
- B** When should my pet see the veterinarian?
- C** What do I get from the veterinarian?
- D** How can I afford my pet's veterinary care?
- E** All of the above





All of the above

The Language that Works ebook offers a close look at the words and phrases that veterinary teams should—and shouldn't —use when talking with clients. It's based on language-focused research that AVMA conducted with pet owners across the United States. Changing how we say things can help pet owners better understand the value of preventive care, and ultimately lead to healthier animals.

Download the free ebook at avma.org/LanguageOfCare






TRUE

OR

FALSE



Most pet owners don't care about having a strong relationship with their veterinarian.

They don't see that as an important aspect of their pet's care.





Pet owners want a strong relationship with their veterinarian. To clients, the word “relationship” signals that the veterinarian is trustworthy, will make their pet feel comfortable, and goes out of the way to provide personalized service.



By using specific words and phrases that resonate with clients, veterinarians can:

- A** Build stronger and more trusting relationships
- B** Increase compliance
- C** Maximize patient outcomes
- D** All of the above





D

All of the above

In order to provide the best possible care to our patients, we need to connect with clients on a foundational level. When our clients trust us, they're more receptive to our recommendations—and more likely to get their pets the care they need. The right language helps us build that connection.



Pet owners agree that _____ is the best measurement of a veterinarian's expertise.



Education

VS

Experience



Experience

Pet owners agree that it's experience, not education, that best measures a veterinarian's expertise. In particular, language that illustrates experience with different animals and conditions resonates with owners.

SAY THIS: "Our veterinarians see and care for hundreds of pets of all shapes, sizes, types, and breeds each year."

NOT THIS: "Our veterinarians have completed many years of specialized medical schooling as well as specialty training."





POP QUIZ

Pet owners want a strong relationship with their veterinarian.

What can we say to show clients their relationship with the veterinary team can extend beyond the physical bounds of the office?



SAY THIS:

“You can ask your veterinarian about anything related to your pet’s health and welfare. Whether it’s over a quick phone call, email, text message or in a routine check-up, you can always turn to your veterinarian.”

This language shows that the veterinarian is available for anything the client needs and makes veterinary care feel more accessible.





TRUE

OR

FALSE



Cost of care is not a top concern for most pet owners.





Pet owners closely associate veterinary care with money. For the most part, they aren't aware of payment options and haven't budgeted for regular care. Empower clients to have conversations with the veterinarian about cost of care, and explore flexible treatment and payment options together.

SAY THIS: "There may be more than one treatment, medication, or procedure that can provide a good result."



Who do pet owners NOT tend to think of when asked about their pet's diet and behavior?

A Groomers

D Internet

B Veterinarians and veterinary specialists

E Trainers

C Pet stores





Veterinarians and veterinary specialists

Pet owners get a lot of support for their pets outside the veterinary clinic, and they often think of veterinarians as handling only the medical side of pet care. It's important to let them know they can come to us for advice about behavior, nutrition, and a wide range of other pet-related questions, without belittling the other sources they trust.

SAY THIS: “Our veterinarians can answer any questions, and provide personalized recommendations for anything related to your pet’s care.”

NOT THIS: “When it comes to your pet no one is more committed or better equipped than a veterinarian.”





Which of these is an effective strategy for communicating with pet owners?

- A** Sharing statistics to demonstrate a need for veterinary care
- B** Establishing that veterinarians are trained in science and medicine and know more than other service providers like groomers and trainers
- C** Demonstrating that the veterinarian gets to know each pet and owner and can make personalized recommendations






Demonstrating that the veterinarian gets to know each pet and owner and can make personalized recommendations

Pet owners understand that a strong and trusting relationship enables the veterinarian to provide better care and more customized recommendations in every area of their pet's care — from vaccines and medications to nutrition and behavior.

SAY THIS: “The best veterinary care is personalized veterinary care. Once we get to know you and your pet, our team can make personalized recommendations that suit your pet's breed, age, lifestyle, temperament, and overall health.”





Pet owners prefer the term “recommendations” over advice, guidance, answers, or insight. What specific language resonates most to describe the recommendations they get from their veterinarian?

A Tailored recommendations

D Recommendations that reflect your circumstances

B Recommendations that are right for you

E Recommendations that take into account your life

C Personalized recommendations





Personalized recommendations

In AVMA's research, "personalized recommendations" emerged as the best language to use in describing what the veterinarian provides, differentiating veterinarians from other sources that provide more generic information.

Pet owners said that hearing about "personalized recommendations" feels positive and leads them to believe the veterinarian "is learning more about you and your pet's lifestyle so they can provide the proper recommendations."





TRUE

OR

FALSE

An effective way to talk about cost is to connect various treatment options to cost-saving preventive care.





Tying options to routine care helps pet owners see they can afford veterinary care on an ongoing basis. It also highlights the idea that budgeting isn't just for emergencies, but also for prevention.

SAY THIS: “Knowing the options available to you can help ensure your pet is getting the routine care he or she needs—which often ends up saving money in the long run.”



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