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Sydney Animal Behaviour Service



Why have I been referred to a Veterinary Behaviourist?

Sometimes a veterinarian or a trainer will suggest referral to a Veterinary Behaviourist for a particular behaviour problem. This is usually because they have recognized a behaviour of concern and want it investigated by someone who is properly qualified to do this, similar to your GP sending you to an eye or skin specialist when you have a problem.

Some problem behaviours may seem 'not that important' but can be pre-cursors to more serious problems, or may indicate an underlying problem that needs to be addressed. Your trainer or veterinarian has had experience with lots of different dogs and cats, and can recognize behaviour that is different or unusual. Just like people, your pet may have an excessively high level of anxiety, or may have abnormal or inappropriate responses to other animals, people or noises.

Shouldn't a good trainer be able to fix the problem?

No! A good trainer recognizes the difference between a training problem, a problem behaviour and a behaviour problem. A good trainer also knows the limits of their own expertise, and does not want to make the problem worse by giving incorrect advice. These trainers will refer you if they feel that it is best for your pet. Be wary of trainers who claim to be able to fix everything.

However, trainers and veterinary behaviourists often work together. A trainer will help you with the behaviour modification program that the veterinary behaviourist has recommended.

What is involved?

Taking your pet to a Veterinary Behaviourist usually involves first filling out a very detailed history form or questionnaire for your pet, and its problem. Some behaviourists will also want audio or video footage of the dog or cat. You should never put a dog or cat at risk just to get footage. The footage should not include any aggressive behaviours.

The veterinary behaviourist will then sit down with you and work through the history, asking questions so that they better understand the concerns of everyone involved. They will want to know what has happened, how the problem has developed, and what has been done so far to try to improve the situation. They will then start to develop a treatment plan for you and your pet. Behaviour consultations usually take a number of hours. Some of this time will be spent discussing possible outcomes, devising a specific behaviour modification program, and helping you to understand why your pet does the things they do.