



Animal Behaviour and Training Council, Advice to Behaviourists during COVID-19 crisis

The ABTC has amended its advice re veterinary referral during the COVID-19 situation to ensure clarity and completeness. This 6 April 2020 document replaces earlier versions.

In the interests of public health, as per Government advice regarding social interactions and distancing, the Animal Behaviour and Training Council believe that aspects of the requirement for an animal to be seen by a Veterinary Surgeon before being seen by a Behaviourist may need to be modified during the COVID-19 crisis. However, this does not negate the ABTC stance that vet referral is essential and needs to be maintained to protect animal welfare. This is because undesirable behaviours in pets can be caused and/or exacerbated by pain and/or illness, and only a vet is able to diagnose and address any underlying medical problems.

It is the Veterinary Surgeon's decision as to whether an actual physical or remote (phone/video link) examination of the animal is required before referral. As normal, we advise that the client talks to the vet, discusses the issue and lets the vet decide about both examination and referral to a behaviourist. Veterinary organisations have issued guidance on the necessity for a physical examination and will provide updates on any modifications to that advice. Therefore, we are confident that veterinary surgeons will undertake a physical examination wherever possible and in accordance with current advice.

As under normal circumstances, should a client not have their animal registered with a veterinary surgeon, it is our view that the behaviourist should advise them on why registration is important and on how to resolve this aspect at the outset. This will enable a referral-based behaviour consultation, as is required by the ABTC code.

As standard best practice, the behaviourist should ask the vet to provide the animal's full veterinary history. As these are usually held electronically, behaviourists can easily receive them via email.

In all cases the behaviourist should maintain clear links with the veterinary surgeon throughout.

The ABTC also recognises that, under current COVID-19 Government guidelines, behaviourists are not able to conduct face-to-face consultations. We thus support the use of remote consultations until the Government advice regarding social distancing measures are sufficiently relaxed. We also support the use of video technology, for remote consultations and to obtain footage of the behaviour of concern, if safe to do so. Any limitations that may be relevant to remote consultations should be made clear to both the referring Veterinary Surgeon and the client.

Finally, we support advice given by ASAB in respect of this matter, and by BSAVA, BVNA and BVA in respect of this and any other veterinary matters.

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