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Mastering Difficult Client Conversations

Course Guide

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Welcome to *Mastering Difficult Client Conversations*. In this course, we will equip you with a process that you can use to successfully handle almost any challenging client interaction. These tools can help client conversations go more smoothly and reduce, or even eliminate, difficult interactions. Confident and successful client conversations are essential to providing top medical care to patients and the best service for your clients.

As you watch the video, use this course guide to reference key points in the course content and practice the skills that are being presented.

This guide also includes:

- Pregame Template (page 4)

Being prepared to tackle challenging conversations will make your day better, your clients happier, and your practice more successful.

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Learn the Process

Client conversations are a big part of veterinary medicine, and sometimes, they can be challenging. There are a lot of reasons why a client conversation might become difficult, but there are also simple steps that you can take to handle almost any challenging client interaction.

1

Step 1: The Pregame

Prior to speaking with your client, pose questions to yourself that are client-focused and reflect on and reframe negative assumptions you may have.

2

Step 2: Listening Questions

Use listening questions to more completely understand your client's perspective.

3

Step 3: Partnering Questions

Use partnering questions and statements to show clients that you are working with them, not against them, to solve the problem.

4

Step 4: Getting to the Solution

Use solving questions to help determine the most appropriate solution.

5

Step 5: Follow-up

Follow up with your client to ensure problem resolution.

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The Pregame

Taking time to prepare for conversations before engaging with clients is critical for success. Before any client interaction, have an empathetic mindset, think about the client's situation, and consider how you can best help them through their challenges.

Your pregame should consist of two parts:

1. Ask yourself questions that will help you to see the situation from your client's point of view.
2. Reflect on and change any assumptions you may have about your clients.

Use the *Pregame Template* on page 4 to prepare for your upcoming client interaction.

PREGAME TEMPLATE

Successful client conversations require preparation on your end. Before the conversation begins, ask yourself questions that help you see things from the client's point of view. Take a moment to reflect on any assumptions you may have about your clients.

See Your Client's Point of View

To get a clear understanding of how a client might feel in this situation, ask yourself the following questions:

- What would I want to know if this was my pet?
-

- What does the client need to understand about this exam/procedure/medication that will help them to see its value?
-

- What level of service do I expect when I go to an appointment? What information would help me to be more understanding if my appointment did not start on time?
-

Reflect On Your Assumptions

Negative views and assumptions are often the barriers to providing the best service to clients and their pets. Use the table below to reflect on your thoughts and assumptions about your clients. How can they be reframed to be more understanding or compassionate towards clients?

Negative Client Assumptions	Reframed Assumptions
<i>Our afternoon clients never show up on time.</i>	<i>I know some of our afternoon clients show up late, but it's difficult to get to our office during rush hour.</i>

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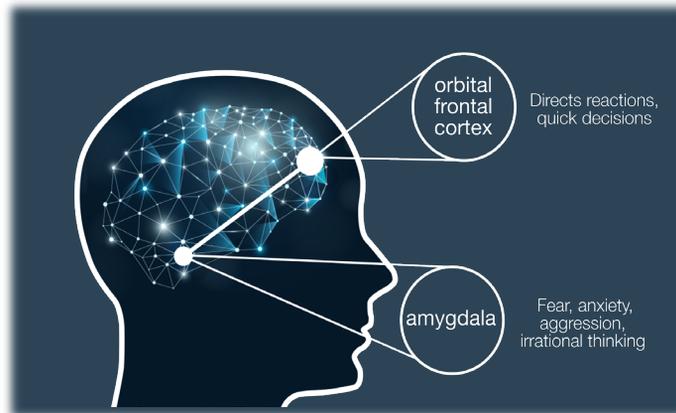
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How Our Brains Works

To deal with challenging conversations effectively, you must be engaged but not emotionally involved. To do this, you must first understand how the brain works during stressful situations.

By understanding the physiological response to unexpected or unpleasant events, you can:

- Understand and regulate your own emotional responses.
- Better understand the emotional responses of your clients.
- Be better prepared for the emotional responses from your clients.



Orbital Frontal Cortex

The orbital frontal cortex directs your reactions to things that are encountered unexpectedly. This part of your brain makes split-second decisions about how to react in different situations.

Amygdala

The amygdala is connected to the orbital frontal cortex and controls emotional responses such as fear, anxiety, or aggression.

Stress-Inducing Chemicals

When your brain experiences something unexpected, stress-inducing chemicals, like cortisol, flood your bloodstream. These chemicals prepare you for sudden action, but also increase your emotional state.

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Questions and Questioning Statements

Questions are critical tools for you to use when interacting with clients. When a client is in a reactive, emotional state, use questions to help them transition to a mindset that allows for reflection, logic, and reason. When you ask questions and give your client time to respond, you are guiding them to a place where complex thought and insight is possible, and problems can be resolved.



Listening Questions

Use listening questions when working through a challenging client interaction. These questions will help you to completely understand the client's perspective, let the client feel heard, help them move from an emotional state, and will help the client see you as a partner who can help them work through this problem.

Sample Listening Questions & Questioning Statements

Tell me more about that situation.

Help me understand more about what happened.

What were your thoughts as this was happening for you?

What were your expectations for how this happened or what we should do in this situation?

Help me learn about your point of view on this so I can help.

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Partnering Questions

Partnering is the act of working together with your client, so that together, you can solve their problem. Partnering questions and statements signal to your client that finding a solution is a collaborative process.

Sample Partnering Questions & Partnering Statements

What can I help with?

Let's work together on figuring this out.

What else do I need to know about your experience here today in order for us to make it a better one next time?

I want to work with you to help your pet improve and get back to normal.

How can we work together to make sure your pet gets his medications each day?

Let's work through this invoice together so I can be sure you fully understand each item.

As I go through my exam, I want to explain what I am looking at and for you to ask me any questions you might have about your pet's health or physical condition.

Solving Questions

Once your client has become less frustrated, you can use solving questions to move forward with a solution.

Sample Solving Questions & Solving Statements

I would like us to work together to make this better for you. Can we do that?

I think we can solve this together now that I understand. Are you ready for us to work on that?

I would really like to help get this fixed for you. Is that okay?

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Understanding Different Solutions

There are four different solutions that might present themselves as you work through this conversation with your client: informational solutions, transactional solutions, additional resource solutions, and relationship solutions

Informational Solutions

Informational solutions are ones that reveal a misunderstanding, some information that was needed and not shared, or a simple miscommunication. If this is the case, acknowledge the misunderstanding, then clarify and share the appropriate information.

Transactional Solutions

Transactional solutions are ones that you can solve with a transaction, action, or change in how the client has been processed. Examples of transactional solutions may include rescheduling a client's appointment or placing an order for an out-of-stock item.

Additional Resource Solutions

Additional resource solutions may be required if you feel that another team member can supply useful information to help solve the problem. When this is the case, bring in an additional team member to help with the discussion while you stay with the client to assist during the conversation.

Relationship Solutions

Relationship solutions can be the most difficult because they involve deeper relationship issues that are more personal. They are needed when you and your client have become disconnected, have lost trust, or even dislike each other.

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Follow-Up

The final step in working through any challenging conversation is to follow up. After supporting your client through a difficult situation, you should check in with your client with a quick phone call within 24-48 hours. This is a great way to ensure complete problem resolution, strengthen the relationship with your client, and to make sure your client feels good about the work you did together.

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Making Recommendations

Sometimes you may face a situation where you must make an uncomfortable or difficult recommendation to a client. Although you may have your own thoughts on how the client should proceed, your job is to make the recommendation that provides the most appropriate level of care for your patient, share clear and accurate information, and support your client through their decision-making process.

Use the steps below to share your recommendations with ease.

1

Remember the Pregame

First, remember and execute the pregame process. This means preparing for the conversation by asking yourself questions that help you see the situation from the client's point of view.

2

Provide Your Recommendations

Next, provide your recommendations and share them in a thorough, straightforward way.

3

Ask Clarity Questions

Finally, ask clarity questions. These questions are important to use in case you forget information or if there is a miscommunication. Your client's answers will help you know whether or not they fully understand your recommendations.

A few sample clarity questions may be:

- What thoughts or questions do you have after hearing about your pet's condition?
- I know I've shared a lot with you about your pet today. It can be confusing sometimes so I want to be sure I have prepared you well to support her care at home. Can you walk me through your home care plan?