

# CLIENT BEHAVIORAL INFORMATION SHEET

Pet behavior often gives us valuable clues about how our pets are feeling or what they might be experiencing. In some cases, changes in behavior can even help us identify underlying medical conditions. Understanding what is normal for your pet, and recognizing changes, plays a key role in keeping them happy and healthy. This document will cover common behavioral issues in cats and dogs and the possible meaning behind them. It serves as an informational piece only and is not intended to replace an exam by a qualified veterinarian.

These are some common behavioral issues:



## Anxiety and Fear

Anxiety in pets can manifest in many different ways. The most common types include fear of loud noises (such as storms, gunshots, and fireworks), separation anxiety, anxiety due to past abuse or neglect, and fear of strangers or other animals. Cats sometimes develop anxiety when around other cats due to dominance disputes and may become less anxious when alone. A lack of stimulation in their environment can also be a source of stress, particularly for cats.

Common symptoms of anxiety include hiding, shaking, panting, pacing, and general uneasiness. Pets with abuse (or neglect) related anxiety may display aggression more frequently or attempt to flee when feeling anxious. In cats, signs of anxiety often include hiding, aggression, over-grooming, or urinating outside the litter box.

Avoiding triggers (like dog parks, and loud events) and providing a quiet, safe space during fireworks or thunderstorms can help. For cats, environmental enrichment such as cat towers, scratching posts, and window seats can reduce stress. In some cases, veterinary intervention may be necessary. Calming medications or behavior-modifying drugs can be prescribed to help your pet feel more at ease.



## Destructive behaviors

Chewing on woodwork, furniture, or pulling up flooring are examples of destructive behaviors, most commonly seen in puppies and young dogs. These behaviors are often due to excess energy and the natural tendency to explore the world with their mouths, similar to how human babies explore. Most dogs grow out of these habits with age. Providing appropriate chews, toys, and brain-stimulating puzzles can help redirect their energy. It's also important to ensure your dog gets plenty of exercise and outdoor time. If destructive behavior occurs primarily when you are away, it may be a sign of separation anxiety.

Cats may display destructive behavior by scratching furniture or rugs. Be sure your cat has designated scratching surfaces (both vertical and horizontal) such as scratching posts or pads. Interactive play and stimulating toys can also help reduce destructive behaviors in cats.



# Aggression

There are very few truly aggressive animals by nature. Most of the time, aggression is driven by an underlying factor. These are the most common forms of aggression:

- Food Aggression – This includes food or resource guarding from other animals and people. Feeding pets in separate rooms or at different times can help reduce food-related aggression.
- Territorial/Protective Aggression – Behaviors such as guarding the house, yard, crates, beds, or owners fall into this category. Management typically involves consistent socialization with other people and animals.
- Fear/Anxiety Aggression – Animals in fearful situations may lash out or bite as an emotional response. This type of aggression can also be linked to past trauma. Treatment usually includes identifying and eliminating the fear-inducing stimuli and, in some cases, using anti-anxiety medications.
- Pain-Related Aggression – Animals experiencing pain due to an injury or illness may react aggressively out of fear and discomfort. Treating the underlying cause of pain often resolves the aggressive behavior.
- Dominance Aggression – This type of aggression typically lacks an external cause and is based on the animal's desire to assert dominance as the "alpha." It can be directed toward other animals or people. Since this behavior is often innate, it is the most difficult to correct. Consistent professional training and structured socialization are essential for improvement.



## Less common behaviors

Poop Eating (Coprophagia) – This is a habit that can lead to the transmission of intestinal parasites and should be discouraged. There are medications available that can help deter this behavior. In cases of poop eating, it's important to analyze stool samples for parasites.

Marking – Urine marking is an innate behavior that typically begins in post-pubescent animals, especially males. Neutering before this behavior starts is the best prevention. However, urine marking can also be learned from other animals. In cats, urine marking tends to increase with the number of cats in the household. Any time a cat urinates outside of the litter box, a urine sample should be analyzed to rule out infection.

Herding – This is a natural behavior in dogs belonging to herding breeds. It may involve pacing around people or animals, as well as nipping. While this behavior is instinctive, it can be redirected through training and proper stimulation.

Pacing – Pacing in senior pets can indicate underlying health conditions such as anxiety, cognitive dysfunction, vestibular disease, or even brain tumors. If your older pet begins to pace, consult your veterinarian. In younger pets, pacing is more commonly associated with anxiety or fear.

Barking – Barking is often a protective behavior, used by your pet to alert you to perceived threats. However, excessive or sudden changes in barking—such as a quiet dog suddenly barking more—can be a sign of pain, fear, or even neurological issues. If your dog's barking behavior changes unexpectedly, a veterinary evaluation is recommended.

