



How CSRs Can Help Pet Owners Prepare

Slide 1

Welcome to the Fear Free module “How CSRs can Help Pet Owners Prepare.”

Slide 2

This module is divided into three lessons. Lesson 1, “The CSR’s Role for the Pre-Visit” will discuss the role the CSR plays in communicating the Fear Free concept, the responsibility for completing the pre-visit questionnaire, and ensuring that the client is following the best steps to reduce the pet’s FAS. Lesson 2, “Creating the Fear Free Environment,” will discuss the CSRs responsibility in creating the best environment to reduce FAS-inducing stimuli for the patients. Lesson 3, “How to Speak Fear Free to Clients” will explore sample scripts and give tips for creating more scripts that highlight the benefits of Fear Free techniques and what pet owners need to know about the Fear Free process in the veterinary hospital.

Slide 3

Lesson 1: The CSR’s Role for the Pre-Visit

Slide 4

After completing this lesson, you will be able to:

- Explain the importance of the pre-visit questionnaire to clients
- Gain client compliance with pre-visit recommendations
- Take the guesswork out of what role the CSR has in pre-visit preparation

Slide 5

The pre-visit questionnaire is the first step for the CSR to take to create a great Fear Free visit for the pet. Information gathered using this form is important to the pet’s well-being. Consider the PVQ as part of the appointment scheduling routine: client name, phone number, reason for the visit, PVQ answers. Consistency is key. It is the job of every CSR in the practice to consistently use the PVQ form when scheduling appointments.

Slide 6

To get the most out of the PVQ, it should be completed and reviewed prior to the appointment. The CSR should be able to offer several options to the client for completing the form, such as completing it over the phone while scheduling the appointment, emailing it directly to the client, or allowing the client to download it directly from the practice’s website. At the very least, the CSR should know the 3 most critical questions to get answered to best prepare the pet and the veterinary healthcare team for the visit.



Slide 7

There are 3 critical questions to obtain answers to.

1. “Who is your preferred healthcare provider?” The CSR needs this information for optimal scheduling of the appointment. If the owner does not state a preferred provider, ask if the pet does better with men, women, or if it does not make a difference.
2. “Has anyone recommended or prescribed a pre-visit supplement or medication to reduce fear, anxiety, or stress?” The CSR must identify the need for any medication, analgesia, or in-hospital sedation. This question also allows for any discussions about things that trigger the pet’s FAS level – such as other pets or difficulty walking on the entrance floor.
3. “Are you able to bring the pet in a little bit hungry along with a favorite toy and treats?” Any medical contraindications to this question must be identified by the CSR when recommending the pet come in hungry or not.

Slide 8

An elevator speech is a quick, 30-second speech. Some tips for crafting your elevator speech include:

- a maximum of 75 words
- it is not about you – it is about the pet and the client
- an attention-grabbing opening line
- and how Fear Free helps the pet with fear, anxiety, and stress.

For example: “To make your visit to our hospital the best it can be for you and your pet. [then continue with why Fear Free, then ask the critical 3 questions].”

Here are some other examples – but feel free to craft one that is unique to your hospital.

“To make Fluffy’s visit as Fear Free as possible, I’m going to ask you a few questions to get an idea about Fluffy’s preferences so we can use the perfect techniques to keep her calm and relaxed during the visit to our hospital.”

Or this one....”Coming to the veterinary practice can be a stressful trip for both pet and human. I am here to make it as Fear Free as possible! I just need to ask you a few questions about Fluffy’s preferences so our Fear Free certified professionals will be able to make the visit the best it can be.”

Slide 9

It is a good idea to have an elevator speech for the first-time pet and one for the regular patients. CSRs will want to have a speech ready for any first-time client who asks, “what is Fear Free certified?” or “What toy or treat would you suggest to bring to the appointment?” If the client says the pet has been medicated for prior hospital visits, be prepared to get the information needed and initiate action to obtain medication for the visit to your hospital.

For the regulars, they may be familiar with the routine PVQ...or then again, maybe not. Do not assume everyone remembers the routine. Review the pet’s Emotional Medical Record to get the information



needed to make the pet's visit as stress free as possible.

Additional tips from the trenches are: Have a dedicated email address for returns (i.e., pvq@abchospital.com), Integrate the PVQ form into other available online forms, and Confirm completion prior to the visit (i.e., during the appointment confirmation call)

Slide 10

If the patient has been seen before & has a pre-visit questionnaire on file, attention should turn to the pet's Emotional Medical Record or EMR. This tool builds on the pre-visit questionnaire as it provides documentation from prior visits to the veterinary hospital. Your goal is to get the same information regarding the 3 critical questions but, you should be able to get it from the pet's Emotional Medical Record.

Slide 11

The CSR must be familiar with the Emotional Medical Record and use the information to discuss the upcoming visit with the pet owner. Review critical issues at the time of scheduling such as the preferred healthcare provider, favorite food and/or toy, and FAS intervention prescribed or used at the last visit.

Remind the pet owner to bring in the pet a little hungry, too. Pet owners are forgetful and they may have forgotten the Fear Free routine for their pet...or to get the refill of the intervention medication (such as a pre-visit pharmaceutical or nutraceutical, an analgesic, or a medication for motion sickness). The CSR should confirm that the pet owner has medication for the upcoming trip – thus avoiding the last-minute emergency call for meds, or worse, the arrival of an unmedicated pet that is now at a high FAS level.

Also, since things change over time, the CSR should ask if there are updates regarding FAS triggers or distraction toys or food. For example, the pet owner may say that a round of fireworks at the neighbor's house now has the dog jumping at any loud sound. This was not a concern on the previous Emotional Medical Record, but it will need to be considered for this visit. Finally, assess the current reason for the pet's visit and determine if there are any medical contraindications to the Fear Free protocol for this specific situation – for example, if the pet is diabetic.

Slide 12

Regular or returning clients don't have to do the pre-visit questionnaire all over again, but they do need to be sure to review these 3 pieces of what now should be in the Emotional Medical Record.

There are 3 critical questions to obtain answers to:

1. "Last time you saw Dr. A. Would you like to schedule with him/her again?" The CSR needs this



FEAR FREE

information for optimal scheduling of the appointment.

2. “Has the doctor recommended any pre-visit steps to reduce fear, anxiety, or stress?” The CSR must identify the need for any medication, analgesia, or in-hospital sedation. This open question also allows for any discussions about things that trigger the pet’s FAS level – such as other pets or difficulty walking on the entrance floor.

3. “Are you able to bring the pet in a little bit hungry along with a favorite toy and treats?” Any medical contraindications to this question must be identified by the CSR when recommending whether the pet come in hungry or not.

Slide 13

The CSR is the first point of contact with the veterinary healthcare team. You have the power to make or break the relationship with the pet owner and the pet, so make every effort to ask the right questions and use the information in the pet’s record to prepare everyone for a Fear Free trip to the veterinary hospital. The Number 1 goal is to have a Fear Free visit.

Know what you need to say and how to say it.

Use the pre-visit questionnaire and Emotional Medical Record forms

Don’t ignore information on the Emotional Medical Record

Slide 14

Lesson 2: Creating the Fear Free Environment

Slide 15

After completing this lesson, you will be able to:

- Increase your comfort with FAS scoring
- Strengthen your knowledge of the use of pre-visit nutraceuticals and pharmaceuticals
- Optimize the use of treats and pheromones
- Deepen your credibility with clients by setting up a Fear Free arrival

Slide 16

It is critically important to rate a patient’s level of FAS, and CSRs are involved in this from the moment the pet enters the hospital. This scale gives CSRs the opportunity to be consistent in assessing and recording every patient’s FAS level, and it gives recommendations on how to proceed. It also provides a way to discuss FAS with the pet owner – especially when used with the FAS Spectrum sheets to visually explain the different signs of FAS. CSRs must not ignore the FAS signs in a pet by thinking the nurse or veterinarian will deal with it in the exam room. “See something, say something” applies here; if you see a yellow or red FAS level, speak up and save the pet from a negative experience.

Slide 17

Every CSR must be on the lookout for FAS alerts. These are things you may see and hear, and where



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they fit in the FAS scale.

These behaviors are all consistent with a higher FAS score, and it is imperative this information gets communicated to the rest of the team

Dog “Putting on the Brakes”: This may be a dog not wanting to get out of the car or forcefully resisting entrance to the practice. These are examples of freeze behaviors.

Dog refusing Treats: If you or the owner have offered a dog a yummy treat and it refuses, it’s a big deal. Remember, dogs are generally motivated to eat when they encounter food. If they refuse, it’s significant.

Dog Refusing to Get on the Scale: The scale can be a huge FAS trigger. As a CSR, getting a patient’s weight may or may not be your responsibility. Your main responsibility may be to prevent an owner from forcing their dog onto the scale. Lesson 3 of this module includes some suggestions on how to address this with owners. If getting the patient’s weight is part of your responsibilities, be sure to review Module 3 in the Fear Free Veterinary Certification Program.

Howling Cat: Cats who are howling are in distress. Need confirmation? Ask the owner “Are there other situations that Fluffy talks to you like this?” The most common answer you’ll get is “No, only when he comes here.”

Cat at the back of the carrier: Like the dog that puts on the brakes, this is the cat’s attempt to freeze or to escape. The cat can’t get out of the carrier so the best they can do is get as far away from the outside world as possible.

Be certain to record the FAS score in the Emotional Medical Record and alert the next team member involved in the visit. Sometimes, the best course of action is not to interact with these patients and allow them to wait in an environment that is less stressful to them. Always refer to the Emotional Medical Record and update it as you learn new techniques for these patients.

Slide 18

Remember, Fear Free techniques are not reserved for use by only nurses and doctors. CSRs may need to assist in handling a patient or answering questions from the client, so familiarity with commonly used techniques to reduce FAS is helpful.

CSRs should understand techniques such as Considerate Approach, Gentle Control, touch gradient, and distraction toys and treats. An understanding of the practice’s sedation protocols is also beneficial when discussing the steps needed to help the pet arrive for the appointment.

The essence of Fear Free is communication. You need to understand how and when dogs and cats are communicating FAS and change your behavior and management of the patients accordingly.

What the patient experiences before meeting with the nurses and doctor can make or break the appointment. If FAS is not recognized and managed straight away, the patient is not being set up for success.



FEAR FREE

As a CSR, how directly involved you are with the patients may vary. But if you see a yellow or red FAS level, speak up.

Slide 19

- A *Considerate Approach* must be used every time a pet comes into contact with the CSR. Considerate Approach encompasses the interaction between the veterinary team and the patient, and takes into account the sensory inputs from environment – including from the patient, client, and team members.
- *Gentle Control* can come into play during curbside service, getting the weight of the pet, or moving the pet into a safe position (be it placing in a crate, or moving away from a rambunctious neighbor in the lobby).
- Knowledge of the *touch gradient* will enable CSRs to know proper touch procedures when discussing the pet's condition with the pet owner, as well as helping the CSR complete the PVQ or update the EMR.
- *Distraction toys and treats* can be helpful when encouraging a pet to enter and exit the lobby and exam room areas. A CSR can place a pheromone infused towel over the carrier until the pet is placed in a comfortable, quiet environment.
- Finally, the CSR should be familiar with the *sedation protocols* and commonly prescribed PVNs and PVPs since the CSR will be dealing with pets having received these medications.

Slide 20

Pre-visit nutraceuticals or PVNs are prescribed to preemptively treat FAS. The use of complementary and alternative (natural) therapeutics and behavior management products may aid in reducing FAS and improve or enhance gentle control at the veterinary visit.

Here is a list of commonly prescribed PVNs:

- Alpha casozepine
- L-theanine
- I-tryptophan

CSRs play an important role in the use of PVNs – to make sure the client has the appropriate PVNs on hand to administer prior to the visit, and to alert the medical team about the pet's FAS score upon arrival – notifying the veterinarian if the pet is displaying moderate or high FAS. If you want to dive deeper into this topic, refer to Module 7 of the Fear Free Veterinary Certification Program.

Slide 21

Pre-visit Pharmaceuticals, or PVPs, are prescribed to preemptively treat FAS. Prescribing them requires a valid Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship. Here is a list of commonly prescribed PVPs:

For dogs: trazodone, gabapentin, clonidine, and Sileo (dexmedetomidine oromucosal gel). For cats: gabapentin.

CSRs play an important role in the use of PVPs – to find out if the client has the appropriate PVPs on hand to administer prior to the visit, and to assess the pet's FAS score upon arrival – notifying the veterinarian if the pet is displaying moderate or high FAS. If you want to dive deeper into the PVPs,



refer to Module 7 of the Fear Free Veterinary Certification Program.

Slide 22

Providing treats to help prevent and alleviate FAS when in the veterinary hospital is one of the hallmarks of a Fear Free protocol. Don't forget to tell pet owners to bring in the pet a little bit hungry, when medically appropriate, to help make treat distractors more effective. Once again, making certain that all the tools are stocked and ready for use is the responsibility of the CSR so that treats can be started as soon as the front door opens and continue until the pet exits the building.

The use of the information from the PVQ and EMR is especially valuable when using the distractor tool. Pets do have preferences and an attentive, vigilant CSR knows to get the latest update on pet preferences when scheduling the appointment to make it easier to be ready for the pet when it enters the clinic. Why lose valuable bonding time trying to figure out what the pet prefers? Be proactive and ready!

Slide 23

The use of pheromones is an important tool for the CSR for preventing and alleviating fear, anxiety and stress. CSRs must make certain they have adequately stocked their "tool bag" by setting up the diffusers, preparing Adaptil bandanas, and having sprays close at hand for use on pet carriers, towels, clothing, and cage surfaces. As a reminder, pheromones should be sprayed on a towel or in a carrier at least 15 minutes before a pet comes in contact with it and sprays should never be applied directly to the pet. A veterinarian would not walk into surgery without preparing all the necessary instruments, and the same applies to opening up the business and having the reception area tools prepared for the day's appointments.

Pheromones are also recommended for use at home during the introduction of a newly adopted pet, as well as situations involving noise fear, separation anxiety, aggression in multi-pet households, inappropriate marking and scratching. CSRs need to be on the lookout for opportunities to help pets at home, too. Talk to clients about using pheromones at home by showing how well they work in the hospital setting. For more details, watch "The Science for Pheromone Therapy: Show Me the Evidence" by Dr. Gary Landsberg on the Fear Free Pets website's webinars page.

Slide 24

Gathering information via the PVQ, reviewing the EMR, and monitoring the patients FAS empower you to help the patient have a Fear Free experience.

If a dog does not approach you and there is no medical reason for you to physically interact with the dog, don't. Contrary to popular belief sticking your hand out for the dog to sniff is not recommended. If the dog does elect to interact with you, be sure not to lean over him/her.

If the cat is not at the front of the carrier soliciting your attention, as tempting as it may be, refrain from peering into cat carriers to 'say hello'.



Slide 25

The CSR's Role in Creating a Fear Free Environment at the practice involves paying attention to sights, sounds, and smells. The CSR must watch out for FAS triggers and alert the business owner when changes need to occur to remove those triggers. Triggers must be assessed along the entire route the pet goes through, from pre-arrival to traveling back home. It is important for the CSR to be prepared and the only way to accomplish this is to ask the pet owner about the pet's FAS triggers, and take the action necessary to reduce or remove those triggers.

Now, there are common triggers for many pets so these should be part of a routine environment assessment by the CSR at the beginning of office hours. Enter into your building and note any new or odd reflections, sights, smells, or noises (such as door chimes). Take a moment to sit in your lobby area – close your eyes and consider any smells or sounds – don't ignore what is common to you such as the phone ringing, cabinet drawers banging, music in the background, or noisy neighbors as pets may respond differently to these triggers. Open your eyes and look at reflections, shadows, and anything that may startle a pet. Fix any FAS triggers you have identified and then proceed with setting up pheromone diffusers, calming music, towel warmers, non-skid devices, and treat choices. Lastly, although this should be first before you even arrive at work, assess your personal presentation – taking into account the smell of lotions, perfumes, or cigarette smoke. Throughout your shift, keep in mind that your voice, behavior, and movement are also part of the Fear Free pet experience – being aware that sudden movement or loud noises can also come from you.

Slide 26

In this section the role of the CSR in creating a Fear Free environment is highlighted by the need to be familiar with Fear Free tools including the FAS Scale, PVNs, PVPs, Pheromones, and distractor treats and toys. Never underestimate the importance of a well-prepared CSR, one who takes pride in creating a Fear Free environment so that every pet feels comfortable entering the veterinary practice. After providing a pleasant arrival, the CSR can pass off a calm pet to other members of the healthcare team – no more rolling of the eyes or marking on the medical chart "caution" and wishing the next person luck in dealing with a fearful, anxious pet.

Slide 27

Lesson 3: How to Speak Fear Free to Clients

Slide 28

After completing this lesson, you will be able to:

- Effectively use scripts to guide clients in the Fear Free process
- Craft new scripts for patient conditions you commonly face every day
- Boost clients' perception of value of the Fear Free techniques the team uses



Slide 29

A script is created to help team members speak with one voice. It helps all the team members to convey the same message and avoid embarrassing miscommunications.

Combining a script with role-playing exercises will help the team build confidence and consistency in the message. It will also give the team the confidence to answer clients' questions and quickly move to solutions instead of guessing at how to make the first response. The ultimate goal of scripts is better communication.

Slide 30

To facilitate strong, consistent communication with pet owners, scripts can provide the means to present all the correct information in an effective, efficient, and professional manner. Words are incredibly powerful and using the correct phrases and tone can go a long way in reducing fear, anxiety, and stress in the pet owner – imagine a world with friendly pet owners who are open to discussing the care of their pet with the veterinary healthcare team! Scripts are another tool that can help the CSR create the atmosphere necessary to build that positive relationship.

Some tips for crafting scripts for different medical situations include:

- Identify key words to use (as well as words NOT to use)
- Identify important points to cover
- Use the power of teamwork to brainstorm where scripts would be most helpful

In addition to using scripts, practicing good eye contact and non-threatening body posture (such as don't cross your arms or stand looking down on a client who is sitting on a chair) also help to deliver the message in a professional manner.

Start building a list of needed scripts based on the call volume received by the team – rescheduling, new patient inquiry, follow-up test scheduling, and the myriad of medical conditions pets develop from birth to adult to senior.

Slide 31

Create scripts to handle common client phone calls. Having step-by-step instructions and scripts enables a CSR to communicate in a succinct, consistent way – preventing any mixed messages or forgetting an important step in the Fear Free process of reducing FAS in the pet. Some scripts to consider creating are:

- why does Fear Free matter (responding to client questions)
- what the client should expect when the visit does not go as planned
- how to provide a Fear Free crate for the pet to rest in
- how to reduce FAS when transporting the pet to and from the veterinary hospital
- the purpose of treats used during the check-in and check-out process
- and how to administer medications at home without inducing FAS in the pet (thus making it



harder to administer the next dose)!

This list can be quite extensive, but here is where a team effort will go a long way in creating scripts that help the CSR inform clients and present a unified Fear Free team.

Slide 32

Common topics to get the team started on scripts are:

- Nail trims
- Anal gland check
- Check ear
- Limping
- Cat peeing outside the litterbox
- Vomiting and/or diarrhea

Slide 33

A script for when an owner requests a nail trim needs to cover a few key points:

- Nail trims can be frightening to the pet
- It is one of the most requested services and will be repeated throughout the pet's life
- We strive to reduce the FAS level of this experience
- And there are options to help the pet

This is how all those points can be covered in a script:

Nail trims are one of the most frequently requested services and can be one of the most frightening to your pet. If [pet name] becomes too anxious or fearful, we will need to either stop and reschedule, or if that is not an option, give [him/her] something to help [him/her] cope. As [Fear Free Certified professionals] OR [a Fear Free Certified Practice], preventing [pet name] from having a traumatic experience is part of how we provide state-of-the art care.

Slide 34

If an owner calls about having their pet's anal glands checked or expressed, the script should include these key points:

- How we make it more comfortable
- What we will do if the pet becomes fearful or uncomfortable
- Why we practice Fear Free for anal gland services

Here is an example of a script for an anal gland check or express:

We use a quick-acting topical anesthetic to help make this less scary and uncomfortable, but if [pet name] becomes too anxious or fearful, we will either need to stop and reschedule, or, if that is not an option, give [him/her] something to help [him/her] cope. As [Fear Free Certified professionals] OR [a Fear Free Certified Practice], preventing [pet's name] from having a traumatic experience is part of



how we provide state-of-the art care.

Slide 35

If an owner calls about having their pet's ears checked, some key points to make are:

- Even healthy ears can be a sensitive area for a pet
- Itchy, red, irritated ears are especially troublesome and can cause pain to the pet
- We practice Fear Free techniques for ear exams

A script may say something like this:

I'm sorry to hear [pet name]'s ear is giving him/her trouble. Healthy ears can be sensitive, never mind when they are itchy and red. So just a heads up, Dr. X will likely want to give him/her an injection of a pain reliever straight away, perhaps even before the exam is completed.

Slide 36

A Limping appointment script should cover:

- The pet may need a pain reliever injection
- We practice Fear Free techniques to quickly reduce the pet's pain

Here is a script for a limping appointment:

We want to get [pet name] feeling better just as soon as we can! During his/her visit, Dr. X may need to give him an injection of a pain reliever rather than just sending him/her home with medicine for you to give. As [Fear Free Certified professionals] OR [a Fear Free Certified Practice], quickly treating pain is part of how we provide state-of-the art care.

Slide 37

A cat peeing outside the litterbox could encompass a multitude of possible medical and behavioral causes. The key points to present to the pet owner are:

- A urine sample is needed
- Pain medication will be needed
- Perhaps why these steps need to occur (clients may want more detail)

Here is an example:

Dr. X will want to try and get a urine sample during [pet name]' visit. Since [pet name] is already uncomfortable, Dr. X will likely want to give him/her an injection of a pain reliever straight away. This will get him/her on the road to feeling better and make the urine sample collection less painful.

Slide 38

The vomiting or diarrhea exam starts with the stool sample! Impress upon the owner to bring in a sample so the pet does not have to go through additional stress of being restrained in order to obtain a sample.



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Here is a sample script:

Part of [pet name]’s exam will include checking a stool sample. If at all possible, please bring one with you. It only needs to be about the size of a quarter, should be collected within 24 hours or less of the appointment and can be stored in something like an old pill vial. You can also pick up a collection container from us. As [Fear Free Certified professionals] OR [a Fear Free Certified Practice], preventing [pet name] from having to have us retrieve a sample goes a long way to minimize any stress associated with the visit.

Slide 39

In this lesson the power of words is placed in the hands of the talented, professional CSR. Every day brings new opportunities to present Fear Free information to pet owners as a way to mitigate fear, anxiety, and stress in the pet. Delivering that message requires preparation and who better to prepare those messages than the very people who love to talk to pet parents – the CSRs. Keep a running list of situations that could use a script and then let the team help build the key points and important words and phrases to use in a script that serves as both a training tool for new hires and a fail-safe way to deliver a consistent message to every pet parent every time.

Slide 40

Some immediate action steps for the CSR upon completion of this module include:

1. Know Your Important Role for the Pre-Visit. The CSR plays an important role in communicating the Fear Free concept, and has the responsibility for completing the pre-visit questionnaire, and ensuring that the client is following the best steps to reduce FAS in the pet.
2. Create the Fear Free Environment. The CSR has a responsibility to help create the best environment that will reduce FAS-triggering stimuli for the patients. This is more than simply acting in a friendly, welcoming way – it is about awareness of your surroundings and what steps can be taken to ensure a positive experience for the pet.
3. Know How to “Speak Fear Free” to clients. Sample scripts and tips are merely a starting point for the CSR to create unique, practice-specific scripts that highlight the benefits of Fear Free techniques and what pet owners need to know about the Fear Free process in the veterinary hospital.

As a CSR, you have made the commitment to learn more about Fear Free and your role in reducing FAS in pets. Take the next step and place what you learned in this module into practice every day at your veterinary practice.

Slide 41

Thank you to our course author, Louise Dunn.

Slide 42

Fear Free would like to thank its corporate program members.



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