

## **Workplace Safety and Health Checklist - Animal Handling**

*(adapted from SPCA's Animal Handling and Transportation Guidelines)*

The first rule when working around animals is to stay alert. Animals sometimes react to situations unexpectedly. Sudden noises, movements or even light can be the stimulus that could cause an animal to react. If you are the primary restraint person, keep your attention focused more on the animal's reactions instead of the procedure. You should learn the proper restraint positions for each species of patients you handle regularly.

It may seem obvious but it is absolutely crucial to remember that an animal does not understand what a person says to them. Some animals may have learnt through habituation to be more tolerant of people, or through abuse, to fear people, and others have been taught how to respond to some commands. What they do understand is body language and tone of voice and therefore these resources should be used in interactions with them.

When interacting with animals you should:

- a) Never stare at an animal as this will be perceived as a threat or challenge. If you need to observe an animal, be sure that you do it in such a manner that avoids it perceiving you as a threat.
- b) Avoid a front-on approach as this will be perceived as a threat or challenge. Some animals may also have difficulty seeing you if you approach them directly front on.
- c) Handle all animals defensively. Do not allow yourself to get complacent. Be attentive to the task at hand. Be aware of appropriate escape options if necessary.
- d) Handle animals gently and with patience which will help to reduce their stress level.
- e) Use minimal restraint compatible with safety.
- f) Always act in a calm, quiet manner while being deliberate and methodical in your movements.
- g) Avoid gestures the animal may perceive as threatening, such as a loud voice and flailing arms.
- h) Modify your tone of voice; what you say is not nearly as important as how you say it.
- i) Remember that an individual that towers over an animal, which is how you appear to them, can be very threatening.
- j) Understand that it is often beneficial to ignore the animal for a short time while attending to another task, or pretending to, which will give it a chance to relax in your presence.
- k) Remember that an animal is likely to be calmer if it is given the opportunity to approach you rather than being approached by you. However, waiting for an approach is not always practical.
- l) Emphasize teamwork which is very important whenever a difficult animal needs to be handled.
- m) Be aware of your own strengths and weaknesses and those of your colleagues.
- n) Remember there is no right approach for every animal. Each instance needs to be assessed individually.