For Your Veterinary Team

A behavior concern handoff and documentation aid

When a client reports growling, snapping, guarding, or biting, document the context, assess immediate risk, and arrange the next clinical step. Use this aid within your practice's protocols.

1 Establish immediate exposure and injury

Record who or what was targeted, any injury and treatment, frequency, escalation, predictability, and access to children, vulnerable people, or other animals. Ask whether the household can reliably maintain separation. Describe the injuries and context; a severity scale alone is not a complete risk assessment.

2 Assess medical contributors

The veterinarian evaluates new or worsening behavior for medical contributors, including pain. Plan examinations, diagnostics, and handling as indicated; document the findings. Address fear, distress, and immediate safety while the medical assessment proceeds. [1]

3 Give a clear interim management plan

Identify the situations to avoid and appropriate separation arrangements. Avoid confrontation and punishment. Recommend reward-based methods; AVSAB's current humane-training position rejects aversive methods. [1, 2]

4 Arrange the appropriate referral

Consider consultation with or referral to a board-certified veterinary behaviorist for aggression, injury risk, complex presentations, or inadequate response. Escalate promptly when exposure cannot be safely managed. Behavioral guidance can support implementation; medical diagnosis and prescribing remain with the veterinarian. [3, 4]

5 Document and keep the handoff connected

Record the client's words, sequence and context, injury history, relevant health changes, findings, interim advice, referral discussion, and agreed follow-up. Give the family the vet-visit worksheet and a named next contact. Confirm what has been arranged rather than assuming the referral happened.

Prepared by Marnie Harris, Canine Family Guidance. This educational aid supports veterinary assessment and practice protocols; it is not a diagnostic instrument or a claim of veterinary endorsement.

[1] Merck Veterinary Manual Behavior Problems of Dogs
[2] AVSAB Humane Dog Training position statement and current clarification
[3] ACVB Information for animal owners
[4] AAHA Assembling a support team