

# Mitigating Animal Stress at West End Animal Clinic

Celine Adams

West End Animal Clinic 829 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, Radford, VA 24141

## The Idea

In July of 2022, I started as a kennel attendant at West End Animal Clinic. Although I had previous experience working in a veterinary setting, I had some difficulty transferring the skills learned from the classroom into a practical setting. As an animal caretaker, I work to ensure that the animals are fed and maintained.

Working as a kennel attendant, it's my job to ensure that any issues the pet may experience in the boarding areas are reported to the doctors and technicians. Many of these issues stem from the stress they experience due to being in an unfamiliar environment. Due to the diversity within the clinic, not everyone has experience or background in animal behavior and handling. Thus, it is important for the kennel attendants to develop the necessary skills to mitigate animal stress. As a result, I developed a guide to handling and identifying animal stress as well as an in-person training protocol, which can be used to assist future generations. The guide will be readily accessible to refer to when needed, and in-person training will be provided if needed.



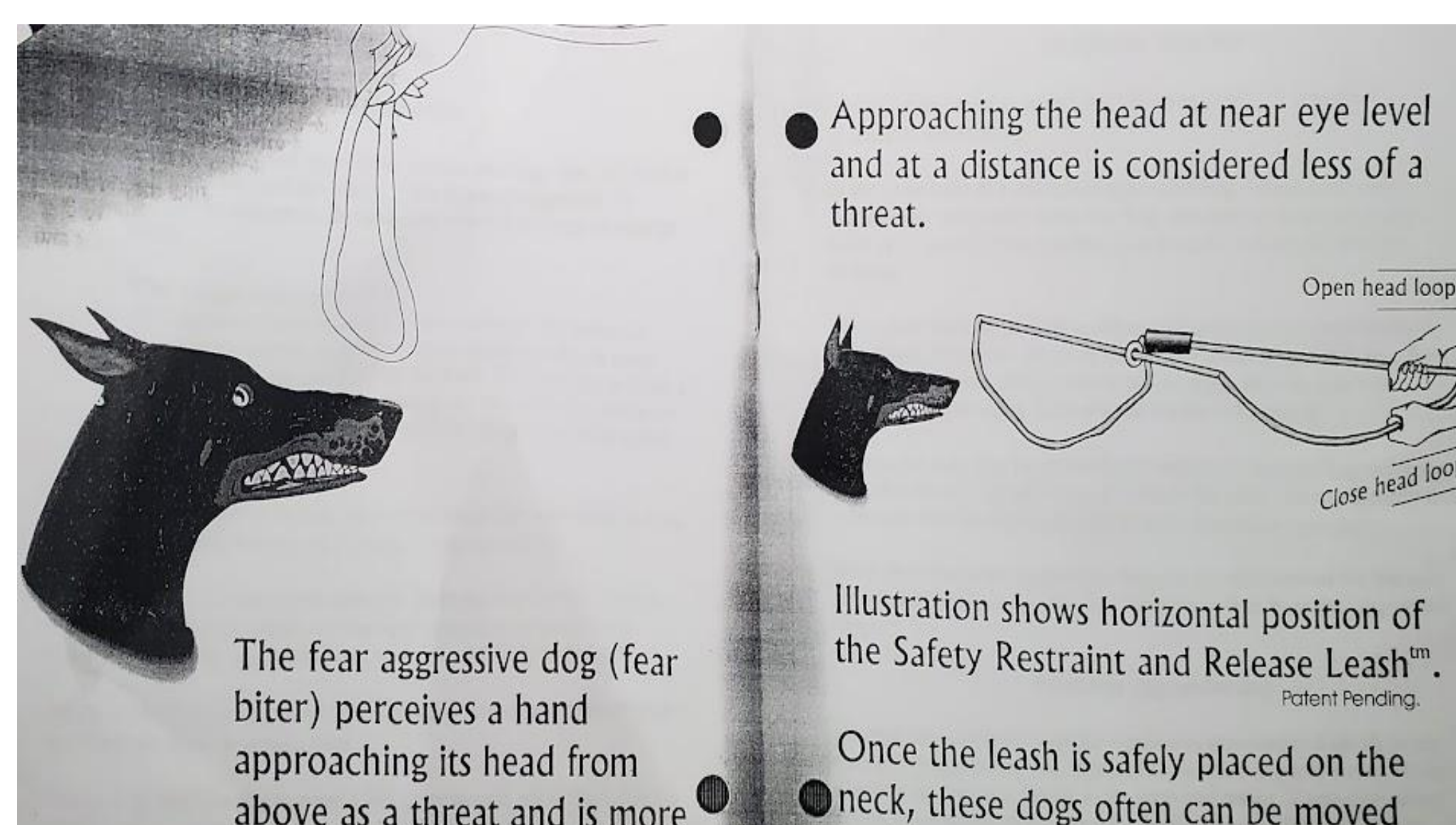
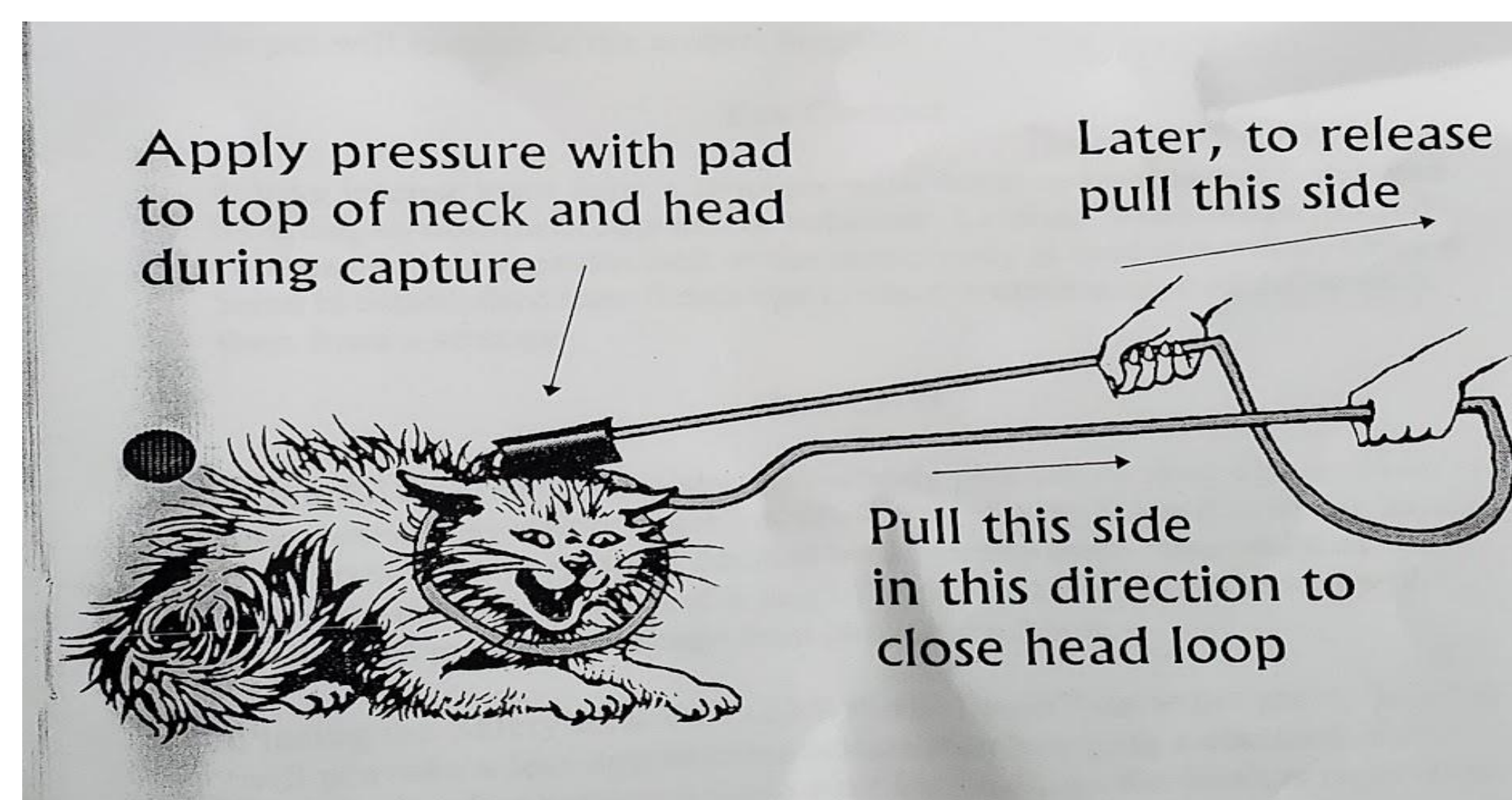
## The Research

To combat the issues faced, I wanted to compile information on the research available regarding animal behaviors and handling. Many of the resources available online distinguish between behaviors and how to handle them. I believe that to understand how best to handle an animal, you need to also understand animal behavior, and what mechanisms may be influencing these behaviors. To develop a well-rounded guide, I referred to a number of different resources, ranging from the information I had learned in class, to webinars hosted by the ASPCA, as well as publications involving animal handling developed specifically for shelter staff.

## Goals

One of the focuses of working within the veterinary industry is to prioritize animal welfare. One main way to improve animal welfare is to decrease animal stress by creating a stress-free environment and providing stress-free handling. Doing this promotes an environment where not only the animals but also the veterinary staff feel safe and comfortable.

When I first approached the idea of developing a guide to handling animal stress, I asked the office manager if there were any training publications available for reference. The resources available were dated from the 1970s and late 90s and are inefficient at communicating concepts to the reader. Although pictures are provided, they are few and far between, and the only existing diagrams are for the use of tools that are no longer in use. To combat this, I wanted to create something that would be updated to be more relevant for the current environment; and provide more information on not only how to handle a stressed animal, but also how to decrease the stress they may be experiencing.



The pictures above depict the only two diagrams in the publications available from the clinic.

## The Process

As I began the process of developing a guide for the kennel attendants at West End Animal Clinic, I had three main things I wanted to discuss: stress behaviors and influences, as well as animal handling. To ensure that the content covered was presented in an engaging, easy-to-read manner, plenty of diagrams and pictures were included.

As I continued with my research, I started implementing the things I was learning into the day-to-day experience of working at the clinic. I added more environmental enrichment for the animals that seemed frustrated from boredom, or if an animal was stressed from noise, I moved them to a quieter area. I started noticing the difference, and found that as the animals became less stressed, so did I!

In addition to creating the manual, I also met up with the kennel attendants to go over the concepts presented. Some of the things we went over included:

- Stress behaviors in dogs and cats
- Stress influences
- Proper approach
- Leash handling
- Environmental enrichment
- Carrier handling

While much of the information presented was familiar, the topics discussed allowed for an exchange of ideas. It also enabled them to begin thinking about how their own behaviors and actions can influence animal stress.

## Acknowledgements

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