

## **Keys to Better Animal Handling**

Our topics for this week are:

- How better animal handling makes one a better person
- Chemical restraint
- Steps to becoming an animal handler
- How to better handle animals

### **Extendend Benefits of Animal Handling**

Animal handling was needed to domesticate animals and reap the benefits of dogs' protective tendencies and assistance in hunting, rodent control provided by cats, meat and fiber of livestock, and the work and transportation assistance of donkeys, horses, and oxen. There are more benefits of living in close proximity to and handling animals than these.

To handle and restrain animal successfully, a handler must learn to control his/her emotions and reactions with animals and to more clearly interact with other people. Learning to handle animals correctly can train the handler to be more disciplined, fair, and clear in communicating to both animals and humans.

Unnecessarily forceful commands, prolonged discipline, unclear or inconsistent instructions, and physical force will not be successful in handling animals and does not work in the long run when dealing with humans.

The personal benefits of handling animals have been long recognized. Atoine De Pluvient, founder of French School of Horsemanship said in 1594: "In training horses, one trains himself." More recently, Hungarian dressage Master Charles de Kunffy said: "The nobility of Europe was raised on horseback. The horse gives the rider courage, empathy, focus, self-discipline, and a sense of justice. The ruling classes became appropriate rulers by being on horseback." To varying degrees, such extended personal benefits are gained by handling all animals, not just horses, if the handler learns to enjoy and handle animals well.

Extended benefits can also apply to family members. Children raised in pet-owning families or on farms with livestock have less allergies and respiratory infections than in children not exposed to animal dander and animal product containing dust.

### **Roles of Chemical and Physical Restraint**

Recent innovations in chemical restraint (sedation and anesthesia) have been highly beneficial to animals, owners, and veterinarians. The ease of chemical restraint has resulted in it being used unnecessarily at times. Chemical alteration of consciousness can alleviate some of the fear and resistance to restraint. However, the value of chemical restraint must always be weighed against the value of proper animal training and physical restraint. Chemical restraint is not void of risks, expense, and time required for supervision. It should never be used simply for convenience of the handler. All sedative and anesthetics have the potential to cause respiratory or cardiac arrest and physical injuries to animals or handlers during the chemical administration, induction, or

recovery. In addition, organ damage from over dosage, individual variation in response, or idiosyncratic reactions is possible. These are some of the reasons that most sedatives and all anesthetics are restricted for use by prescription or usage by a licensed veterinarian.

Chemical restraint should be the third and last option to handling and restraining animals. Proper animal training should be first option. Careful application of humane physical restraint should be second. Furthermore, when chemical restraint must be used, it should be supplemented by sufficient humane physical restraint to optimize the animal and handler safety during administration, induction, and recover from the drug's effects.

### **Keys to Better Handling of All Animals**

Good handling of any type of domestic or tame non-domestic animal involves proper preparation and 10 basic keys.

The steps to becoming an animal handler include:

- Read about animal handling
- Observe normal animal behavior
- Gain guidance from a good handler
- Observe a good handler with animals
- Practice under a good handler's supervision

The 10 keys to better animal handling are:

1. Frequently, but briefly and gently handle young animals during their critical socialization period to reduce their natural fear of humans while being mindful not to eliminate their inherent respect for humans.
2. Quietly handle healthy adult animals frequently for short periods to habituate the animals for handling without an association with fearful, painful events to follow.
3. Confine animals in environments as similar to their ancestor's natural habitat as reasonably possible, e.g. crates as dens for dogs, pastures as Eurasian grasslands for horses, and deep substrate as desert sand for hamsters.
4. Provide environmental enrichments that will prevent or reduce boredom and stereotypic behaviors.
5. Confine animals with as much personal space as needed to prevent or minimize stereotypic behaviors.
6. Maintain social like-species support for animals by keeping prey, pack, and flock animals in groups with a size appropriate for the species.
7. Minimally handle elderly, neonatal, or sick animals to prevent their exhaustion or pain.
8. Handle animals with confidence, using smooth rhythmic movements along with a calm low-pitched voice.
9. Be able to recognize abnormal behavior for the species and the individual, including fear or signs of health problems.
10. Use correct timing and type of responses to favorable or unfavorable animal conduct to shape their future behavior to handling.

## **Ideals and Realities**

Animal handlers should always be advocates for ideal animal handling conditions and scheduling. However, in the reality of day-to-day animal handling, animals often must be handled in less than ideal conditions and during less than ideal times due to medical or hazard emergencies or because of owners who are unwilling or incapable of providing ideal conditions. There are situations when delay of handling is in the best interests of the animal, while other situations may mandate doing the best handling possible under less than ideal conditions to act in the timely best interests of the animal.

Unless a handler is comfortable with leaving animals in danger or being handled by less competent personnel, it is advisable for a handler to become familiar with, and skilled in, a variety of means of handling animals, some of which may not be needed in ideal conditions or at ideal times. For example, using a rope on a stick for capture, steel tube panels for traps, casting a cow with ropes, and using a detached tubular gate as an emergency glide are not needed in ideal conditions, but these can be the best, or only, methods to successfully handle animals in some handling conditions. To provide no assistance in handling animals whose welfare is in danger because conditions are less than ideal is a form of handler negligence. A good animal handler provides the best assistance for the animals in danger with the tools and techniques that are available at the time as long as there is reasonable expectation of safety for the animals and the handlers.

Now, let's recap the key points to remember from today's episode:

- Learning to better handle animals improves the handler character and interaction with people
- Chemical restraint should not be used as a substitute for good training and handling, and it should not be avoided if without it there is reasonable risk of injury to the animal or its handler
- There are 10 keys to better animal handling
- Adjusting ideal handling practices to realities you are presented with requires flexibility and contingency plans

More information on animal handling is available in my book, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint* published by CRC Press. It is also available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Additional information is available at <https://www.betteranimalhandling.com/>

Don't forget serious injury or death can result from handling and restraining some animals. Safe and effective handling and restraint requires experience and continual practice. Acquisition of the needed skills should be under the supervision of an experienced animal handler.