



Pet Behavior Counseling

Helping you and your pet become best friends for life.

BRAMBELL'S FIVE FREEDOMS

Understanding Our Animals Needs

A significant cause of stress for an animal occurs when its most basic needs are not being met. One of the first and most comprehensive efforts to define an animal's most basic welfare needs started in Great Britain in 1965 with the establishment of the Brambell Commission. This commission, created by Parliament, was charged with reviewing the treatment of farm animals and developing a minimum standard for meeting their needs. They created what is known as "The Five Freedoms," which is an excellent starting point for evaluating the welfare of any animal, including pets. The five freedoms are:

1. **Ensure your pet is free from hunger, thirst and malnutrition.**

This sounds relatively simple — provide your pet with food and water and the need is met. However, I encourage you to give this more thought. Is the food you feed your pet wholesome and a type that would be in their natural diet? Are they allowed to consume this food in a manner that is natural for their species? We also must consider that too much food is equally bad, as evidenced by the significant number of obese pets we see today.

2. **Ensure your pet is free from discomfort.**

Again this freedom seems relatively straight forward — make sure your pet always has adequate shelter from temperature and weather extremes. However, there is much more to comfort than hot versus cold and dry versus damp. Your pet also needs a quiet, comfortable resting place where they can be undisturbed and where they will feel safe. You need to make sure that their environment is free from things that may cause them harm. Your pet's breed also affects what they need to be comfortable. If they have a long coat they may be unable to adequately groom themselves, in which case you must groom them on a regular basis, so that their hair does not become tangled and matted, causing them discomfort. Lastly, dogs and cats, like humans, are social animals and depend on interactions with others to be comfortable.

3. **Ensure your pet is free from pain, injury and disease.**

One of the easiest ways to meet this freedom is to make sure your pet gets an initial series of vaccinations to ensure that they are protected against diseases, followed up by annual wellness checks and as-needed visits to your veterinarian. At home, a weekly body check can alert you to any changes in your pet's physical condition. Being free from pain is very similar to being free from discomfort so the pet's grooming needs must also be considered. Remember, dogs and cats are designed by nature to not show pain and thus weakness, so often times they will attempt to hide their pain.

4. **Ensure your pet is free to express normal behaviors.**

This freedom is the one that is most often overlooked, as many pet guardians are either unaware of the huge repertoire of normal pet behaviors or because they do not approve of some of these normal behaviors such as "butt sniffing." In order to express normal behaviors your pet needs adequate space in which to run and an enriched environment to stimulate their minds and bodies. Toys enrich your pet's environment by giving them something to play with; however they also need interaction with living things as well. While our pets hopefully enjoy our companionship they also need adequate opportunities to interrelate with others of their own kind in a positive situation. That does not mean you need to have more than one dog, but it does mean your dog needs to have some suitable doggie friends in the neighborhood or at daycare. However, these friends must be of a similar temperament, age, size and play-style and the interactions must be enjoyable for all. Not all dogs get along, just as many people do not get along with one another. When people get a cat, I almost always recommend they get two.

5. **Ensure your pet is free from fear and distress.**

I truly believe that no psychologically healthy human would ever intentionally cause their pet fear or distress. However, lack of knowledge, or incorrect knowledge about animal behavior, certainly causes a great deal of fear and distress in our canine and feline companions. As a behavior consultant I see a great number of dogs for "aggression" which is almost always based in stress related fear.

Far too many people are still not aware of how critical a well thought socialization plan is for a puppy when they are between 8 and 16 weeks of age. During this time most puppies are very accepting of new environments, people and situations — as long as they are setup to ensure it is a positive experience. Socialization does not end after the critical socialization period, rather it should continue throughout a pet's life.

Socialization is equally important for a kitten but happens at a much earlier age (2 to 5 weeks) before they leave mom and the breeder.

A lack of adequate physical and mental stimulation can also cause a pet to become anxious. Both dogs and cats need a moderate amount of both

physical and mental exercise on a daily basis. A pet that does not get adequate exercise may become bored and frustrated, and start exhibiting behaviors which you will find undesirable. This can often be seen in destructive behavior exhibited by a dog and inappropriate hunting behavior by a cat. On the other hand, too much stimulation and exercise can also be detrimental, causing a state of chronic stress. Activities need to be well balanced with rest.

When we add a pet to our family we are bringing them into a very foreign environment and culture with very different rules. On top of that we are expecting them to understand a foreign language while we often make no effort to learn their language. We need to educate our pet to live in our world and educate ourselves about the pet world if we are to keep them free from fear and distress.

We also need to actively protect our pet by avoiding stressful situations until they have had adequate socialization and training. You are their guardian and as such must take responsibility for managing their interactions with the environment and other living things.