

THE BEST VET FOR YOUR PET

Developing a comfortable—and lasting—relationship with a veterinarian is just as important as finding the right doctor for yourself or your kids. Douglas G. Aspros, D.M.V., immediate past president of the American Veterinary Medical Association, shares his tips for finding the best match.



Do Some Legwork

Check nationwide databases, like myveterinarian.com and the American Animal Hospital Association (healthypet.com), for standardized listings with basic information—accredited practices, names of doctors, the kinds of pets they care for and hours of operation. If your animal has a specific condition, seek a professional with expertise in that area. Also ask other owners you know or see, like at a dog park, for recommendations. An office's online presence can give you insight into the vet's philosophy, but be

wary of judging based only on Web critiques. "Most practices have a fairly small number of reviews, and rants are more common than raves," advises Aspros.

Use Your Senses

You can tell a lot from what you see, smell and hear. An office that reeks of disinfectant is a sign that the staff is trying to mask strong odors. Even if the decor seems outdated, equipment should be modern and employees welcoming, knowledgeable and organized. Pay attention to how the staff communicates, both with one another and especially

with you and your pet. "The quality of care has to do with a doctor's ability to understand your concerns," Aspros says. If you can't establish an open dialogue with the vet and his or her team, your pet might not get the attention and help he requires.

Schedule a Visit

Once you've narrowed it down to two or three candidates, go to their offices. Most vets are willing to find time for a brief one-on-one in advance of an official appointment. "Explain that you'd like to come in before deciding on a family vet," says Aspros. While offices don't usually

charge for this, check first. And remember, it's just a meeting. Don't bring all your pet's records and expect a free check-up.

Ask Questions

Take full advantage of the initial meeting to get the answers you need to make an informed decision. Inquire about walk-in policies, after-hours coverage, payment options, insurance and boarding. Above all, trust your instincts. "If the place looks neat, the people seem warm and clients have a genuine rapport with the staff," says Aspros, "you should feel secure that you're making a smart choice."

Well Visit

Expert Douglas G. Aspros, D.M.V., weighs in on what to consider when your child asks to accompany you to the vet.

HOW IT CAN HELP

She'll gain insight into the emotional commitment that comes with caring for another living thing.



By observing the staff's interactions with pets, your child will learn empathy, patience and compassion.



If she's interested in a veterinary career, she can see what the doctors and nurses do on a daily basis.

HOW IT CAN HURT

He may see sick or anxious pets in the waiting room, which can be upsetting.



Even the gentlest animal can get anxious at the vet, which could lead to bared teeth or claws and a scared child.



Your kid might have to deal with potentially confusing—and distressing—decisions if your pet is gravely sick or hurt.