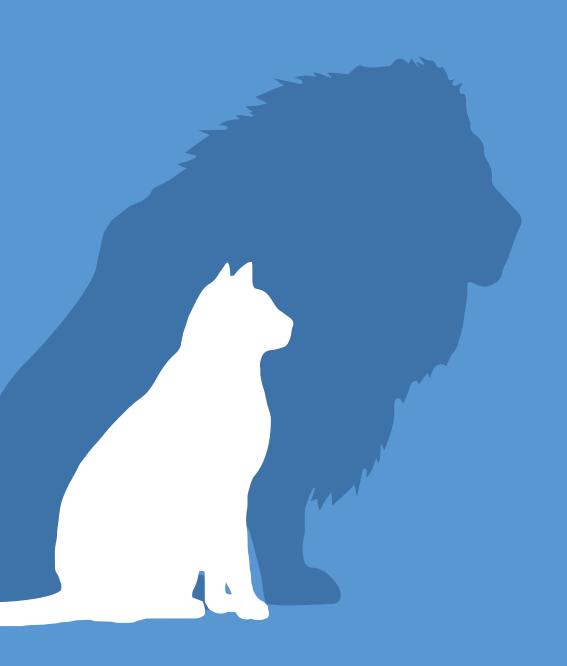# wethrive

Working with upset

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When people get upset it is useful to be able to intervene. Simply telling them to calm down is rarely useful, but here's an idea that does work:

Under every bit of human behaviour, including communication behaviours, there lies an emotion. We think of ourselves as logical creatures driven by a conscious intelligence, but in fact our conscious thoughts only act an adviser to the emotional brain, which is constantly trying to get its needs met in the world.

This is so important that people become upset when it doesn't work - and this explains the three main reasons why people become upset:

• They expect something to happen and it does not

• They want to do something and something stops them

• They want to communicate something and can not.

When someone becomes upset the first task is to acknowledge the emotion they are experiencing, *as otherwise they will go on trying to communicate it*.

This is one of the times when the instinctive ability to empathise has to be kept in check, so you can work out what emotion they are feeling and acknowledge it without being sucked into the emotional state of the upset people.

Ask yourself, or them, whether the upset is likely caused, at its root, by one of the three things in the list above, and then acknowledge the emotion that you think they must be feeling. You could say something like: "It's so frustrating that we thought x would happen today and now it won't", or whatever.

Note the first part of the sentence acknowledges the emotion of frustration. The actual cause of that is secondary.

This will start to take the heat out of the situation so you can gently ask questions to find out about the causes of the problem.

Whether it is an inappropriate expectation, a skills gap, or something else, bring it into consciousness and discuss what is needed and how that new resource or whatever can be introduced.

Turn the difficulty into a goal, arrange the necessary resources, and then rehearse the new approach. See *Helping people change* for more details.

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