



Joint Standards of Practice and Professional Code of Ethics

Mission: To promote excellence in the animal training and behavior profession through science-based, humane practices, guided by industry collaboration and a commitment to animal well-being.

Developed By: This document was created by the steering committee of the Joint Standards of Practice Coalition, a group of animal training and behavior organizations committed to the above mission. These organizations include:

- Association for Professional Dog Training International (APDT International)
- International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants (IAABC)
- IAABC Foundation (IAABC-F)
- Karen Pryor Academy (KPA)

Developed For: All signatories of the Joint Standards of Practice (JSOP) and those professionals who seek membership and/or credentialing within those organizations.

These Standards of Practice and Professional Code of Ethics have been adopted by all signatory organizations of the JSOP Coalition. These organizations are responsible for ensuring their members and certificants uphold both in their conduct and the delivery of professional services, and that all educational programs they offer are developed in alignment with these standards.

Joint Standards of Practice

Standards of Practice provide a shared foundation for how professionals conduct themselves. The purpose is to establish clear expectations for ethical practices and professional conduct. These *Joint* Standards are put forward to provide all organizations with minimum standards, such that each organization can have higher and individual standards. This document is designed to guide animal behavior and training professionals in maintaining high levels of care, competency, and professionalism.

Professionals adhering to these Joint Standards are expected to:

- Maintain professional development through study of relevant texts and participation in educational opportunities such as conferences, courses, and workshops.
- Abstain from representing training and behavioral information as scientific, unless the information is derived from peer-reviewed and published research.
- Refrain from offering guarantees regarding the outcome of training and behavior work.
- Always maintain professionalism through:
 - Providing services honestly
 - Treating animals, colleagues and clients with respect
 - Preserving client privacy and confidentiality

Joint Professional Code of Ethics

The Professional Code of Ethics sets forth the standards of conduct that professionals associated with the signatory organizations must adhere to in their professional capacity. These standards outline both best practices and required behaviors. Any professional who fails to abide by this code, or who does not cooperate with investigations, reviews, or ethics proceedings, is subject to revocation of membership or credentials, removal from roles, or other appropriate measures.

Principle I: Responsibility to Clients

Professionals:

- 1.1 Shall not discriminate on the basis of race, age, sex, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, gender, health status, religion, political beliefs, national origin, immigration status, or sexual orientation.

1.2 Shall respect the right of clients to make decisions regarding their pet's management, training and care. Professionals are responsible for helping clients understand the potential consequences of those decisions.

1.3 Shall obtain informed consent from clients before videotaping, audio recording, or permitting third-party observation.

1.4 Shall obtain signed waivers, contracts or agreements prior to the start of services.

1.5 Shall ensure and oversee the safety of clients, animals and the public in implementing training and behavior programs.

Principle II: Confidentiality

Professionals:

2.1 Shall not share, in any forum, information that could reasonably lead to the identification of a client, prospective client, research participant, or other person with whom they have a confidential relationship, without prior written consent.

2.2 Shall keep accurate and complete records of all clients, their animals, services provided, and the conclusion of the services provided.

2.3 Shall obtain consent from the client prior to sharing information with any outside parties, the only exceptions being in cases when physical safety and/or financial liability concern a potential client or other professional relationship.

Principle III: Professional Competence and Practice

3.1 Well-Being and the Five Domains: Behavior plans must support both immediate behavioral goals and the animal's overall well-being and long-term success. Professionals must adhere to the Five Domains Model (Mellor et al., 2020; Littlewood et al., 2023), which lists the five components of animal welfare as nutrition, health, physical environment, behavioral interactions, and mental state.

A. **Nutrition:** If the animal appears to be an unhealthy weight, or if there is other reason to suspect a nutritional concern, professionals must recommend veterinary evaluation to the animal's guardian and, with the guardian's consent, collaborate with the veterinary professional as appropriate. Professionals must remain within their scope of practice when making recommendations or offering nutritional advice.

- B. **Health:** Professionals must consider any underlying health issues that may influence behavior.
- i. For all new cases, verify that the animal has had a veterinary examination within the past 12 months. If not, recommend that the caregivers schedule an appointment to rule out possible medical concerns.
 - ii. Refer to a veterinary professional if behavior concerns are severe, sudden in onset, multi-faceted, not easily explained by environmental or developmental factors, or if progress is limited despite appropriate intervention.
 - iii. Modify training plans as necessary to accommodate the animal's health status and life stage while continuing to work toward established goals.
- C. **Physical Environment:** Professionals must assess whether the animal's environment meets their behavioral, emotional, and biological needs. This includes, but is not limited to (Mellor et al., 2020):
- Adequate space
 - Appropriate bedding/substrate
 - Clean air and appropriate air quality (e.g., species-appropriate humidity levels)
 - Absence of aversive or noxious sounds or scents
 - Appropriate temperature
 - Conditions conducive to adequate sleep
 - Reasonable balance of predictability and variability
 - No prolonged exposure to fear-inducing stimuli
- i. Provide recommendations and assistance to the client to improve the environment as needed, while taking into account the client's abilities and resources.
 - ii. Behavior plans must be adjusted to minimize prolonged exposure to environmental factors that cause toxic stress, fear, or discomfort, and the professional should identify and mitigate factors that fail to meet the animal's needs.
- D. **Behavioral Interactions:** A critical component of all behavior and training plans is consideration of the animal's interactions with the environment, humans, and other animals (Littlewood et al., 2023). Practitioners must evaluate these interactions and, when necessary, implement comprehensive behavior plans. For example, if an animal displays fearful or aggressive behavior during social interactions, a plan may

include avoiding or minimizing distressing situations, educating caregivers to observe and respond appropriately to body language, increasing enrichment and confidence-building exercises, and implementing desensitization and counter-conditioning.

- i. Practitioners must use thoughtful antecedent arrangements that meet the animal's needs, ensuring the environment is managed to prevent rehearsal of undesired behaviors and to support behavior change.
- ii. Agency is critical to well-being (Englund and Cronin, 2023; Littlewood et al., 2023; Špinka and Wemelsfelder, 2016). Therefore, behavior plans must offer the animal control, choice, and agency whenever it is safe and reasonable to do so. In all interventions, animals must be offered multiple appetitive choices, such as whether to engage in the training session, which reinforcers to use, and how to interact socially. Behavior plans must be adjusted based on the animal's feedback.
- iii. Professionals must treat each individual, regardless of species, with respect and consideration for their unique nature, preferences, abilities, and needs. This includes actively working to understand the animal's preferences. The professional's goal is to create a partnership that values the animal's comfort and well-being.

E. **Mental State:** Behavior plans must prioritize the animal's emotional well-being in addition to achieving behavioral goals. Professionals must consider the animal's subjective experiences, as well as objective measures of behavior, to ensure interventions are ethically sound and lead to sustainable outcomes.

3.2 Procedure Selection: Professionals shall utilize non-aversive and/or positive-reinforcement-based training, and support the animal's emotional well-being and comfort. The focus should be on the learner's freedom to engage in behaviors that result in favorable outcomes for the learner.

- A. Professionals shall not use training, management, or behavior modification techniques that rely on fear, pain, distress, or harm. This includes, but is not limited to:
- Positive-punishment-based strategies
 - Management practices that significantly restrict the animal's movement, choice, or ability to perform normal behaviors
 - Intentional deprivation of food, water, or social interaction

- Tools or equipment designed to cause, or that functionally result in causing, fear, pain, or startle
- B. Professionals must do their best to recognize their own inherent biases when considering procedure selection and working with animals and people. The professional must aim to consider the perspective of the learner's experience (both human and animal). In addition, professionals must recognize that internal states—such as pain, fear, stress, or fatigue—may serve as antecedents that contraindicate training and require that the learner's immediate well-being take priority over any intervention.
- C. Professionals understand that only the learner can determine what is appetitive or aversive and must recognize and apply this principle for the benefit and well-being of the learner. Professionals will develop training or behavior interventions based on the animal's breed, age, health, home environment, past experiences, and the owner or caretaker's knowledge, skills, and abilities. The professional must continually assess handling, petting, interactions, food, tools, equipment, and the environment from the animal's perspective.
- D. In addition to the approaches listed in 3.1, professionals will focus on teaching and reinforcing desired behaviors to replace undesired behavior(s), while ensuring the new behavior serves a similar function for the animal.
- E. When applying new safety and management tools, a comprehensive conditioning process must be completed to ensure tools are not causing fear, anxiety, or pain or are otherwise aversive to the animal. This does not justify the use of tools that would otherwise not be permitted under 3.2.A. Guardians or handlers should be taught how to use training equipment safely, effectively, and in ways that protect the animal's physical and emotional well-being.
- F. The behavior plan must minimize risk to the animal, the caretaker, and the community and shall address foreseeable risks to the animal and the public.
- G. Professionals may work with clients who are already using aversive techniques or tools, provided they do not introduce, recommend, or implement these methods themselves. In such cases, the professional must do their best to educate and support the client in transitioning to humane, science-based alternatives that prioritize the animal's well-being. This approach is grounded in harm reduction and relationship preservation, recognizing that maintaining trust with the client increases the likelihood of lasting positive change. During the transition process, the

professional must also do all they can to mitigate the negative impacts on the animal. The goal is to replace pre-existing aversive interventions with effective, non-aversive or positive-reinforcement-based strategies that ensure long-term behavioral success and well-being.

- 3.4 Professionals shall maintain competence in training and behavior through qualified and approved continuing education.
- 3.5 Professionals shall maintain a functional knowledge of, and adhere to, applicable laws, ethics, and professional standards.
- 3.6 Professionals shall provide truthful advertising and representation concerning their qualifications, certifications, experience, performance, and pricing of services.
- 3.7 Professionals shall refrain from providing guarantees regarding the specific outcome of training and behavior plans.
- 3.8 Professionals shall provide full disclosure of potential conflicts of interest to clients and other professionals.
- 3.9 Professionals shall work within their professional education and recognized expertise and shall seek additional guidance or education when confronted with complex or difficult cases. Professionals shall refrain from taking cases beyond their experience.
- 3.10 Professionals shall maintain their own scope of practice by not advising on problems outside their recognized professional education and certifications, and shall not provide advice or recommendations in areas of veterinary medicine or family counseling unless licensed and qualified to do so.
- 3.11 Professionals shall not permit employees, subcontractors, or supervisees to perform, or represent themselves as competent to perform, professional services beyond their training, experience, and certification. Professionals are responsible for holding employees, subcontractors, or supervisees accountable for following the Joint Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics during service delivery.
- 3.12 Professionals shall ensure that recommendations and opinions are accurate, evidence-based, and within the bounds of their expertise. When making public statements, professionals have an additional responsibility to present these views clearly and responsibly, recognizing their potential impact on the public.

Principle IV: Professional Conduct and Regulatory Compliance

Professionals:

- 4.1 Shall be respectful of colleagues and other professionals, and shall not condemn the character of their professional actions, nor engage in public commentary that is disrespectful, derisive, or inflammatory. This includes the use of electronic media for deliberate, repeated, and/or hostile behavior against colleagues and other professionals.
- 4.2 Shall maintain adequate professional liability insurance coverage, in accordance with local ordinances.
- 4.3 Shall comply with applicable laws regarding the reporting of animal bites and suspected abuse or neglect.

Principle V: Financial Arrangements & Truthful Representation of Services

Professionals:

- 5.1 Shall clearly disclose and explain to clients all financial arrangements and fees related to professional services prior to entering into a professional relationship.
- 5.2 Shall accurately and truthfully represent the nature, scope, limitations, and potential outcomes of services provided to clients, third-party payors, and students, ensuring that all information communicated is clear, complete, and not misleading.

Principle VI: Advertising

Professionals:

- 6.1 Shall accurately represent their competencies, education, skills and experience relevant to their practice of training and/or behavior modification.
- 6.2 Shall only use titles, degrees, certifications and designations that the person or organization has earned. The practitioner will not mislead the public when using such identifiers.
- 6.3 Shall correct, wherever possible, false, misleading, or inaccurate information and representations made by others concerning their qualifications, services, or products.

6.4 Shall not represent themselves as providing specialized services unless they have the appropriate education, training, or experience.

6.5 Shall refrain from making misrepresentations regarding marketing and logos for which they are no longer eligible, and remove logos and claims of certification when no longer maintained.

6.6 Shall agree to use the most current logos and follow recommended usage of said marketing materials.

6.7 Shall not commit business fraud, plagiarism, copyright infringement, misuse or misappropriation of logos or trademarks, theft of intellectual property, slander, or libel or other unethical activities.

Principle VII: Illegal Behavior

Professionals:

7.1 Shall not be convicted of cruelty, abuse, or neglect of animals or humans, crimes against humanity, or violence against animals or humans.

7.2 Shall not engage in cruelty, abuse, or neglect of animals or humans, crimes against humanity, or violence against animals or humans.

7.3 Shall not be convicted of crimes directly related to the responsible party's professional qualifications.

7.4 Shall not engage in gross misconduct directly related to the responsible party's professional qualifications.

Principle VIII: Cooperation in Matters Related to Ethical Complaints

Professionals:

8.1 Shall cooperate with ethics procedures from the inception of an ethical complaint through the completion of all proceedings regarding that complaint. Non-cooperation may result in disciplinary actions up to removal of membership and/or revocation of credentials.

8.2 Shall not threaten or pursue retaliatory actions of any kind against any parties or witnesses to an ethics complaint. Both during the course of the complaint and after the completion of all proceedings.

Principle IX: Appeals

9.1 Any respondent to a complaint who wishes to appeal a sanction may do so in accordance with the complaint process.

Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

Definitions

1. Antecedent Arrangements: Arranging the environment to change the behavior of an animal.
2. Appetitive: A stimulus the animal seeks to interact with or acquire, or something pleasant to the learner.
3. Aversive: Any stimulus – technique, tool, or method – the animal seeks to avoid, or that is designed or used with the intention of causing fear, pain, or distress.
4. Desensitization: The structured process of gradually reducing emotional reactions to previously distressing situations.
5. Behavioral interactions: Interactions with the environment, humans, conspecifics and/or other species. (Littlewood et al., 2023)
6. Behavior Plan: For the purposes of this document, this term includes the meanings behavior plan, training plan, and/or curriculum for group classes (including safety and risk mitigation procedures).
7. Counter Conditioning: Technique used to change an animal's emotional response to a stimulus by associating it with something positive or rewarding. This method is often used to replace a negative or fearful response with a more desirable or relaxed one by pairing the feared stimulus with a pleasant experience.

8. Humane: Showing concern for the well being of living beings.
9. Improving Welfare: eliminating or minimizing pain and suffering.
10. Improving Well-being: Promoting positive emotional states.
11. Reinforcement: The act of adding or removing stimuli to increase the likelihood of a behavior being repeated in the future.
12. Subjective Experiences: an individual's unique, personal perceptions, feelings, and interpretations of consciousness, shaped by their own thoughts, emotions, and sensory inputs
13. This document uses the following definitions of choice, control, and agency, from Englund and Cronin (2023) :
 - a. Choice is the “act of choosing or selecting from more than one alternative.”
 - b. Control is the “ability to predictably and effectively produce desired results in a given situation.”
 - c. Agency is the “ability to exert control and overcome challenges in one’s environment to gather knowledge and enhance skills for future use.”
14. Toxic stress: Distressing environment(s) and/or experience(s) that exceed the animal’s ability to effectively cope, resulting in long-term negative impacts on emotional, behavioral, and/or physical health. (paraphrased from McEwan, 2017)

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- Englund, M. D., & Cronin, K. A. (2023). Choice, control, and animal welfare: Definitions and essential inquiries to advance animal welfare science. *Frontiers in Veterinary Science*, 10, 1250251. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fvets.2023.1250251>
- Littlewood, K. E., Heslop, M. V., & Cobb, M. L. (2023). The agency domain and behavioral interactions: Assessing positive animal welfare using the Five Domains Model. *Frontiers in Veterinary Science*, 10, 1284869. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fvets.2023.1284869>

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