



## **A Guide to the Association of Animal Behavior Professionals' Professional Practice Guidelines**

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This guide will provide elaboration on the Association of Animal Behavior Professionals set of Professional Practice Guidelines. It will help explain the principles and each guideline under each principle heading. The purpose of this document will be to help clarify the principles and guidelines, and to promote professional ethics generally.

Professional Practice Guidelines and codes of ethics are necessarily broad and general so that they may apply to a wide range of situations and behaviors. This guide will help the professional to apply the principles and guidelines to specific situations and behaviors more readily.

The purpose of the guidelines themselves is explained in the introduction of the guidelines:

*The Association of Animal Behavior Professionals (AABP) membership is dedicated to the highest standards in professionalism; standards of excellence rather than mere competence. Professional animal training and behavior consulting has the potential to achieve great benefits but also great harm, making it vitally important to make responsible choices regarding our professional conduct. The core ethical principles and guidelines provided here serve to inform the public regarding AABP's and its members' stance on ethical practice and to help guide members on making ethical professional decisions that are designed to benefit, them, the public and the profession. Below are the AABP Mission and Methodological Stance, followed by a set of professional guidelines. AABP does not condone any behavior in breach of these principles and guidelines.*

The AABP's mission is included in the Guidelines' introduction as it sets the context in which the guidelines are presented.

## *Mission*

*The Association of Animal Behavior Professionals (AABP) was founded to promote excellence in professionalism and a strong commitment to nonaversive methods among behaviorally oriented technologists of companion animal behavior. The AABP seeks to establish a community of members aspiring to and sustaining these principles.*

One of the key features of the AABP mission is its dedication to the least intrusive methods available. This is explicated in its methodological stance:

## *Methodological Stance*

*The AABP and its Members recognize the following two principles (the first, philosophical, the second, empirical):*

*1. The dignity and autonomy of the sentient learner, no matter what species they belong to, deserves respect.*

*2. Non-aversive methods are generally more effective than highly intrusive methods. Positive-reinforcement-based methods are the most effective and efficient, and least risky and harmful methods to use in animal training and behavior change programming, and most conducive to facilitating the human-animal bond. Aversive stimulation-based methods are generally inefficient, counterproductive, risk serious harm and are the most likely methods to deteriorate the human-animal bond.*

*Consequently, the AABP and its Members adopt the ethical stance that the Least Intrusive Effective Behavior Interventions (LIEBI) be utilized as a guiding principle in constructing behavior change programs. For further information on the LIEBI model, [click here](#).*

*Under all but the most rare and extreme circumstances, and only in adherence with the LIEBI model, AABP and its Members do not condone or endorse the use of aversive tools such as, but not limited to choke chains, prong collars, electronic invisible fencing or electronic shock-collars. Nor do we condone or endorse the use of aversive methods such as but not limited to leash corrections, helicoptering, hanging, alpha-rolling, scruff-shaking, spraying the animal in the face with fluid, throwing things at the animal, hitting in any way or otherwise creating fear or pain in animals in contravention of the LIEBI principle.*

The LIEBI model can be explored in great detail through this source:

O’Heare, J. (2009), The least intrusive effective behavior intervention (LIEBI) algorithm and levels of intrusiveness table: A proposed best practices model. *Journal of Applied Companion Animal Behavior*. 3, xxx-xxx (in press).

It is also available on the AABP web site at:

- <http://www.associationofanimalbehaviorprofessionals.com/liebi.pdf>

Next comes the Preamble to the set of principles and guidelines:

#### *Preamble*

*The AABP Professional Practice Guidelines includes a set of guidelines and principles on which all AABP Members (hereafter referred to as Professionals) conduct themselves. The AABP Professional Practice Guidelines assures the public that AABP Members conduct themselves with the highest standards of professionalism. This public assurance likewise offers the Professional the confidence of the public.*

*Professionals work to develop a valid and reliable body of scientific knowledge, based on research and apply that knowledge to helping companion animals and their guardians live together in mutually fulfilling relationships. They strive to help companion animal guardians develop informed choices concerning companion animal behavior and problem prevention and resolution. They carry out this objective in a manner that respects the autonomy and dignity of all others. These core ethical principles and professional practice guidelines help us promote this principle of professionalism.*

The reason we utilize a set of professional practice guidelines is because it is generally beneficial for everyone; it is beneficial for the dog and the client because, in doing so, we recognize and respect their autonomy and dignity. It is also beneficial for individual professionals because professionals benefit from the trust that comes from having earned it with ethical conduct. It is good for the profession as a whole because it brings credibility to what we do.

## The Guiding Principle

### *The Guiding Principle*

*Professional animal trainers and behavior consultants conduct themselves with respect for the autonomy and dignity of others, be they human or nonhuman.*

All of the principles and guidelines in this set of Professional Practice Guidelines are derived from the guiding principle that each individual sentient being is an autonomous being and we owe each individual respect for their dignity. We treat others with respect and avoid harming them with our professional conduct. If we can keep this broad general principle in mind, it will help us avoid some unethical choices and help ensure we rectify problems as effectively as possible when they do arise.

### **Principle 1. Competence: Professionals operate within their competencies with empirically supported behaviorally oriented methods.**

Competence is about being sufficiently capable for a task. To be competent to carry out professional consulting services with guardians of companion animals, the consultant must possess sufficient knowledge, skill and diligence (Welfel, 2002, pp. 47 - 49) in assessing cases, constructing behavior change programs and monitoring progress with a reasonable rate of success. Knowledge refers to understanding the body of information in one's field and its limits, and how to evaluate new information. Skill refers to one's ability to successfully apply knowledge in applied settings and usually comes from hands-on supervised practice. Diligence refers to making successful professional interventions a highest value priority.

*1.01. Professionals work within the bounds of their competence. They provide only services for which they are demonstrably competent. Competence may be achieved through formal education and tested or formal professional consultation with competent educators. It is also ideal that the professional have supervised practice and evaluation in the area of claimed competence.*

There are many ways that professionals can develop their competencies. Self-study and practice can sometimes contribute to competence under some circumstances, but it lacks a criterion often valuable in competency development: objective evaluation. Formal education that presents a well rounded, objective and science based treatment of the topic in question as well as evaluation of

whether the education objectives have been achieved through formal testing of some kind provides a means of more objectively determining whether a true competency has been achieved. Formal education is often the best bet for foundational training because it provides a means by which the professional can judge more specialized information and skills. Consultation with competent supervisors or colleagues is another way of developing one's competencies.

Many competent professionals lack educational credentials, especially those who have been practicing since the early days of modern animal training. This is common in a relatively young industry where there are no readily available and standardized programs of study and programs that do exist have generally only been in existence since the turn of the century. True competence is not to be confused with common reliable measures of competence (such as certification and education credentials). Nevertheless, educational credentials are a valuable means of assuring that a professional is competent. In other words, we assume some level of competence from credentials but we cannot assume the opposite; that a lack of formal credentials indicates incompetence.

*1.02. Professionals provide services in new behavior sets only after undertaking formal education and testing, or formal professional consultation in that area sufficient to understand fully the risks and benefits as well as proper application of the service.*

One particularly important feature of developing one's competency in an area is that they understand the potential risks and benefits of the related interventions, strategies, procedures or tools, as well as when and how to apply the information to professional service provision. If these issues have not been learned then competence cannot be assumed.

When a professional wishes to provide specific services that they have not yet become competent in, they seek to develop that competency before providing the service professionally. For example, where a behavior consultant is not sufficiently competent in taking a case involving aggressive behavior where children are involved, they may seek to develop their competencies by taking a formal course in the topic and/or formally consulting with a competent colleague. The professional may be able to arrange to assist in the case that they refer the client to another professional or they may seek formal supervision. The point is that professionals are careful to ensure that they are indeed competent in any topic, which they provide professional services for, and until they have developed sufficient competency, they do not provide professional services in that area.

*1.03. Professionals seek to use techniques that are empirically supported and are cautious of techniques or practices that are not empirically supported by research.*

Professionals utilize science-based strategies, procedures, products and tools that are empirically supported and demonstrably effective. Numerous half-baked products, theories of behavior and behavior change procedures are used by animal trainers, even when these trainers do not have any

legitimate empirical reason to believe that they will be effective or even that they are safe. Using such procedures and products is a sign of incompetence, and refusal to use them is what separates the ethical professional from others. In order to make ethical use of a product or procedure, the consultant must know the potential risks and benefits associated with the application. They must understand how the product or procedure works and ensure that there is reliable evidence of its usefulness. Anecdotal evidence involving testimonials from email lists is generally not reliable empirical evidence that a product is safe and effective. Even if it were true, it is not the whole story. Ideally, a product or procedure should be tested in formal studies that are published in peer-reviewed journals. Otherwise, there should be a sound argument to support the practice based on well-established principles of behavior. By making use of empirically supported methods and avoiding methods and products with unknown risks and benefits, the professional diminishes the likelihood of doing harm and increases the credibility the public will hold for the field as a whole. Particularly where there is risk associated with a product or technique, or there is any component of unknown risks, the professional should seek informed consent from the guardian. Professionals are sometimes seen by lay-people as being rather conservative in their approaches, but, in many cases, these “conservative” professionals do far less harm than those who are on this “cutting edge.” The public can count on professionals to do less harm and they are respected as ethical as a result.

*1.04. Professionals refer clients to competent professionals when they, themselves, are not competent to accept a case and they do so as soon as practicable.*

Where the professional determines that they do not possess the relevant competencies to handle a case, they refer the client to either a known competent colleague or to a source that can make such a referral. The directory at <http://www.associationofanimalbehaviorprofessionals.com> is useful for this purpose. If it is a borderline case, generally, the professional should still refer the client, but where appropriate, they may seek supervision instead and thereby develop their own competencies. These decisions need to be made as soon as practicable in order to prevent delayed intervention.

*1.05. Professionals work with clients and/or their companion animals from a behavioral (rather than medical-model) orientation in order to describe, explain and change specific, observable, measurable behaviors and avoid explaining behavior at other levels of analysis (e.g., speculation regarding underlying psychological disorders or syndromes).*

See the AABP position statement related to this topic at:

<http://www.associationofanimalbehaviorprofessionals.com/theoreticorientation.html>

and see:

[http://www.behavior.org/behavior/what\\_is\\_behavior\\_analysis.cfm](http://www.behavior.org/behavior/what_is_behavior_analysis.cfm)

As professional technologists of behavior dedicated to the natural science of behavior, we avoid speculation in favor of observable and measurable empirical findings. We avoid treating behaviors as though it were disease by classifying and “diagnosing” it with broad general labels, or invoking ethological theories such as “dominance” to explain behavior. Instead, we identify the specific measurable behaviors that are to be changed and we make specific, empirically supported changes to the environment (antecedent conditions and consequences) that then cause changes in the behavior.

**Principle 2. Nonmaleficence: Professionals are careful not to do harm to others and protect the interests of vulnerable parties in the professional relationship.**

Nonmaleficence means “do no harm,” a foundational principle of professional ethics. Many of the principles in this set of guidelines are derivatives of this fundamental caution to do no harm.

*2.01. Professionals take reasonable steps to avoid harming animals or clients behaviorally, emotionally or physically.*

Unfortunately, it cannot go without saying that professionals must think proactively about the likely effects of their encounter with clients and their companion animal, and avoid conduct that will cause harm to any of them. This is a general statement, of course, that can be applied to a wide range of situations and is worth considering in any case.

*2.02. Professionals recognize that the companion animal is the vulnerable part in the consultation relationship and therefore, where a true conflict of interest presents itself between the guardian's interests and the companion animal's interests, the Professional seeks to resolve the conflict in a way that satisfies both party's interests, and where this is not successful, the Professional makes the interests of the companion animal the priority and clarifies this priority to the client.*

Companion animal behavior consultants work for human clients to change their companion animal’s behavior and have obligations to both the companion animal and the human client. At times (granted, rarely), conflict can arise between the interests of the companion animal and the interests of the human client. In some cases, a client may want the consultant to advise on and simply condone a predetermined course of action with the companion animal that is excessively

intrusive, or unethical in some other way, because it may cause unnecessary harm to the animal. For example, guardians who wish to use shock devices, “alpha rolls” or excessive confinement may aim to convince the consultant to support their choice rather than make other recommendations. It is vitally important for the consultant to have a clear sense of their ethical responsibilities and obligations in such cases.

Family pets in the consulting relationship are much like children in the relationship between families and psychologists. The companion animal, like the child, is a vulnerable party because they cannot offer informed consent. Consultants must make the companion animal’s welfare the priority in these rare true conflicts of interests, just as the child’s welfare is a priority in family counseling. It should be noted here that we are talking about true conflicts of interests—situations in which both interests cannot be satisfied at the same time; where they are contradictory interests that actually oppose each other. The guardian’s role is that of the client, who has control over how they treat their companion animal and makes the decisions regarding which parts, if any, of the behavior change program are implemented. This does not give the client moral license to unjustifiably harm the animal, any more than a parent has moral license to unjustifiably harm their child, but it does mean that they, and not the consultant, are in charge of what happens to the animal. The role of the consultant is to advise clients, and in some cases, work directly with the companion animal.

In most cases, the priorities of the client and the companion animal are aligned. However, if a situation arises in which the guardian cannot be dissuaded from a course of action that may harm the animal, the consultant must not bow to pressure to endorse or condone it (thereby reinforcing the behavior). The guardian has the right to know up front that the consultant’s ethical priority is the wellbeing of the companion animal. It is obviously important to be flexible and work *with* clients to help them find ways to change the animal’s behavior effectively and efficiently, but there may be times when guardians are not willing to compromise enough to make their behavior acceptable. In these instances, it is the responsibility of the consultant to remind the client of the consultant’s ethical obligation to the animal, and refuse to endorse or condone treatment of the animal that is unjustifiably detrimental. The consultant’s participation must be beneficial and never detrimental to the animal.

*2.03. Professionals do not condone or facilitate client conduct toward their companion animal that is excessively intrusive / aversive with continued participation in its administration. If a client persists in ignoring the consultant's recommendations in this regard and cannot be dissuaded from that course of action, the Professional considers terminating the professional relationship.*

This guideline is related to 2.02. This guideline addresses an ethical dilemma. An ethical dilemma is a situation in which two moral precepts, principles or values conflict and where a choice must be made (where failure to choose will also generate consequences that essentially make that choice). In this case, there is an obligation to help minimize the harm done to the animal on the one hand and there is an obligation to not condone, endorse or facilitate harm.

To be more specific, there are instances in which this conflict arises wherein, if the consultant ends the professional relationship, the client may simply resort to their original plan of action and harm will likely come to the animal if this occurs (it is also possible that they will realize the error of their ways by the professional discontinuing the relationship). In this outcome, declining the case may seem like abandonment, something the ethical professional avoids. On the other hand, the professional respects the autonomy of the client and can only really be responsible for their own conduct; the client must be responsible for theirs. In other words, both parties are autonomous moral agents responsible for their own conduct. Condoning and facilitating unethical treatment of a companion animal does harm to all parties, including the profession as a whole; we as professionals simply do not help clients implement unethical interventions.

Obviously, compromise and flexibility are important in the professional consultation relationship and this guideline is not addressing these situations. This guideline is targeted at situations in which no reasonable and ethical solution is acceptable to the client, where they seem dead-set on ignoring important consultant recommendations and utilizing some treatment that will likely cause harm to the companion animal. In this kind of unusual situation, the choice seems to be between staying on and attempting to coax the treatment into a less harmful form or discontinuing the professional relationship. A choice must be made and neither is ideal—it is, as pointed out, an ethical dilemma. This guideline recognizes the autonomy of individual agents. The client must make their choice and the professional must make theirs. Each is responsible for their own conduct and professionals simply do not condone or facilitate the causing of harm. As in most ethical dilemmas, there will be delicate grey areas of decision. The consultant is urged to give careful consideration to the situation and the conflicting principles/values and how they apply to the situation and choose as consistently as possible with the guideline not to condone or facilitate (and possibly reinforce behaviors resulting in) harm.

*2.04. Professionals do not participate in spreading untrue information about fellow professionals. Professionals ought to ensure that any discussion about a fellow professional be accurate and constructive.*

It is unethical to participate in the dissemination of untrue information as it relates to fellow professionals. This kind of unprofessional behavior brings discredit to both the person disseminating the information and the person about whom they are discussing. It also degrades the credibility of the profession as a whole. This guideline addresses both beneficial and detrimental information. It is unethical to misrepresent others either to make them seem better or worse in some way than they are. Of particular concern is the dissemination of information that slanders other professionals in some way. Whether some piece of information is a fact is rarely applicable. A fact is a discrete and confirmable piece of information that involves no inferences. Most slanderous statements involve information that may have some component of truth but is slanted or biased in some way or presented with fallacious inferences. It is important that professionals discuss other professionals in a discrete, constructive and truthful manner.

There are instances in which it may be necessary to express disagreement with a colleague's position but generally, the disagreement should be with the position or information rather than the individual. If a professional has concerns about a colleague's conduct, they should discretely discuss it with that individual, or report it to the appropriate professional association or certifying body rather than make public statements.

There may be exceptions to this guideline of course, but generally speaking, the professional ought to be very careful about what they say about others, ensuring it is accurate, constructive and respectful.

### **Principle 3. Informed Consent: Professionals seek appropriate informed consent from clients.**

Informed consent is derived from respect for the autonomy and dignity of the client.

*3.01. Professionals obtain appropriate informed consent to consultation, using language that the client might reasonably be expected to understand and they confirm comprehension on an ongoing basis. The content of informed consent should include the following parameters of the relationship (a) confidentiality and its limitations, (b) fees and payment methods and schedules as well as consequences for failure to make payment for services rendered, (c) Professional's credentials and experience, (d) priority of the companion animal's interest over client's interests if a true conflict of interest arises, (e) goals, techniques, limitations, risks, and benefits of consultation, (f) methods of assessment, (g) client's right to refuse or question any part of assessment or training including any handling they believe is inappropriate and potential consequences of such refusal, (h) the client's right to ask further questions and be clear on all relevant details before consenting to the consultation relationship.*

The client is responsible for their companion animal. The client has the right to make decisions about what is done with and to their companion animal, in a similar manner to a parent making decisions about professional treatment of their children. Clients have the right to know ahead of time exactly what each person's role is, what their responsibilities are, what the consultant plans to advise on and do, what the risks are, how much the services will cost, what the consultant's policies are, and that they are free to discontinue the consultant's services at any time at their discretion. The initial consultation should include discussion of all of these matters, and the consultant should obtain the client's written consent before proceeding. Consultants should also discuss their liability waiver/clause before clients are asked to sign it. This could easily be achieved by including the written informed consent in the services contract, a copy of which will be retained by both the client and the consultant. Informed consent should also be obtained

throughout the course of the behavior change program, and the consultant should continue to ensure that the client consents to all interventions.

Informed consent documentation should use language that the client can reasonably be expected to understand and should include the following parameters of the relationship:

- Confidentiality and its limitations;
- Fees, payment methods and schedules, and consequences of failure to pay for services rendered;
- Behavior consultant's credentials and experience;
- Priority of dog's interest over client's, if a conflict of interest arises;
- Goals, techniques, limitations, risks, and benefits of consultation;
- Methods of assessment;
- Client's right to refuse any part of the assessment or behavior change program, including any handling they feel is inappropriate, and potential consequences of such refusal;
- Client's right to ask further questions and be clear on all relevant details before consenting to the consultation relationship.

*3.02. Professionals do not take inappropriate advantage of clients with open-ended professional relationships. They set specific quantifiable behavioral objectives and terminate the professional consulting relationship when the behavioral objectives have been achieved. Additional goals ought to be discussed and agreed to explicitly rather than assumed.*

A behavioral approach to changing behavior is very much focused on setting specific measurable objectives and utilizing the data from ongoing assessment and implementation of evidence based behavior change programs. The professional should always establish specific behavioral in the professional relationship and should avoid open-ended relationships, especially ones that serve mainly to provide a source of income rather than achieving important behavioral objectives. Professionals are careful not to take unfair advantage of clients in any way, and in particular, in this way. This is not to say that new important objectives will not reveal themselves through assessment or a behavior change program, but these ought to be addressed specifically and informed consent sought for intervening to achieve them.

**Principle 4. Confidentiality: Professionals maintain appropriate confidentiality except where necessary and inform clients of these exceptions.**

Confidentiality, along with the other principles is a specific derivative of respect for the autonomy and dignity of the individual agent.

*4.01. Professionals inform clients that information regarding their consultation will be kept confidential to the best of the Professional's ability except for certain limits or exceptions. Exceptions include the following circumstances: (a) if the animal is dangerous to others or is likely to be in danger from inhumane treatment, in which case the Professional must report such danger if it cannot be managed and prevented, (b) if required by law to breach confidentiality.*

Although companion animal behavior consultants are generally not recognized as having “privileged communications,” it is important that they respect the privacy of the client’s information and keep that information confidential. While confidentiality is important, it is also important to understand the exceptions to confidentiality. Clients must understand under what circumstances the consultant is ethically (and, in some cases, legally) required to break confidentiality. Generally, if a companion animal is being abused and the client cannot be dissuaded from their harmful behavior, the abuse should be reported to the relevant animal welfare authority (e.g., SPCA or police services). Consultants should also explain that they are ethically required to report a problem in which a companion animal poses a serious risk of danger to people or other animals and the consultant does not believe that the situation can be safely managed. If called on by a court of law to speak on the consultations, the consultant would also have to comply. The client should know this; it should not be a surprise. Ideally, this should be presented in the services contract between the client and the consultant.

*4.02. Professionals will obtain a written release waiver of confidentiality if the professional wishes to discuss the case with a supervisor or colleague for purposes of advice and professional guidance, or to publish an account of the case.*

If clients want notes or documentation of consults released to another consultant or other person, consultants should obtain a written consent before releasing the information. This will help prevent misunderstandings later. The consultant’s records should be written in such a way that there would be no problems or embarrassments if the client or others were to read them. Records should also be retained after the consulting relationship has terminated in case the client seeks help in the future for the same or another problem with their companion animal. If the client subsequently seeks advice from another consultant, they may want to give the notes to the new

consultant. It is a professional obligation for consultants to have these notes and give copies of them to the client upon receipt of a written consent. Any concerns about the contents of the notes should be discussed with the client, but ultimately it is the client's right to obtain the case notes.

If the professional wishes to use information from a case for supervision or professional consultation purposes, this should be part of the informed consent discussion and documentation, including a waiver so that the professional can discuss the case with their colleague or supervisor. Under supervision, all information in the case ought to be discussed including identifying information where appropriate. With colleagues, case details may be shared but identifying information such as names and perhaps locations ought to be kept confidential. If the professional wishes to use the information in a presentation or case study, they will need to get a release waiver signed and identifying information needs to be left out or changed (it is not relevant anyway).

**Principle 5. Advertising and Marketing: Professionals are honest about their services and credentials and use their AABP member's logo appropriately.**

Many professionals advertise their services but as professionals, we are obliged to do so ethically, again, to respect the autonomy and dignity of potential consumers, us as individuals and to our profession as a whole. Trust and credibility are built partly on our honesty and transparency when it comes to advertising our services. Advertising does not only include advertisements in magazines and newsletters or in email posts to discussion lists. It also includes our verbal behaviors utilized toward gaining business and indeed any form of our behavior that serves to gain customers / clients.

*5.01. Professionals are honest about the likely results of their services, which ought to be derived from empirical evidence, and do not promise specific changes in behavior. Professionals contract to provide their services and advice only, and may provide a contingency arrangement for non-achieved behavior goals rather than a promise to achieve them in the form of a blank guarantee.*

This guideline has two parts, one general and one a specific instance. Generally, the basic precept is to be honest about the objectives of the service—the product. If the professional provides training services, they should not, again, exaggerate with guarantees of a perfectly well behaved companion animal upon completion. If a professional provides courses, seminars, workshops or programs of study, they should not make exaggerated claims of the likely outcomes. If the professional provides behavior consultation services, they should not guarantee, in a blanket manner, to eliminate the behavior. The claims should be realistic and ideally empirically based. It is fine to provide a contingency arrangement wherein, if the objectives are not met, some specific recourse will be invoked (such as remedial instruction or continued free classes or more free hours

to reevaluate the case and adjust the behavior change program etc.). A blanket guarantee without specified contingencies is unethical. The underlying principle of this guideline is honesty. In the short term, deception and exaggeration may bring in a few more clients, but in the long run, the reputation and credibility of the professional and the field as a whole even, are diminished, thereby reducing the possible client base. In the long run, honesty pays.

*5.02. Professionals are honest about their credentials and experience. They do not mislead clients or the public about credentials they possess and act to correct misunderstandings or misrepresentations that occur. In no case shall a Professional use an illegal credential or imply irrelevant credentials are authoritative in professional behavior change services provided.*

Another instance of applying the principle of honesty to advertising and marketing relates to credentials. We are a young profession and there are no specific requirements for credentials so there will be great variability. In advertising or discussing credentials, professionals take reasonable step to prevent others from overestimating the competencies attained. Exaggerating credentials is unethical. If the professional has a degree for instance in an field unrelated or barely related to the field in which they are advertising services, they should either not utilize the degree credential or specify the exact nature of the education where ever it is used. Allowing people to assume your unrelated degrees have specifically contributed to your competence as a trainer or behavior consultant is unethical. It is better to err on the side of safety also and follow these guidelines for educations that are perhaps related in some way but where it is a stretch.

Another example involves seminars and workshops. Attending these educational events is a useful way to develop one's competencies but (especially where there was no formal testing of the achieved competencies instructed) advertising that one was "mentored by" the presenter or that they were "educated by" the presenter and similar exaggerations are likely to deceive consumers into believing that the experience provided more of a credential than it realistically did.

*5.03. Professionals only use the AABP logo corresponding to the membership type they possess; do not use it in a way that will likely give the impression that the AABP endorses a company or organization instead of recognizing the individual Professional's membership; and the logo is not used along with other logos or other information reflecting organizations described in guideline 8.03 of these guidelines.*

This guideline helps ensure to continued credibility of the AABP and hence the members and indeed the field it helps represent. If you are not a member, do not use the AABP logo at all without permission from the association. If you are a General Member, do not use a Professional Member logo.

AABP Membership is awarded to individuals and not to organizations and it would be dishonest to give the impression that the AABP endorses an organization by using the AABP logo without reference or adequate suggestion that it is for an individual rather than the organization as a whole.

Another practice that could diminish the credibility of the association is using the logo along with logos of other organizations that actively promote aversive methods or tools. This practice could easily also be interpreted as the professional's endorsement of such methods, tools or organizations and would therefore be contrary to other guidelines as well. The AABP seeks to ensure that the AABP logo presents a clear message, which will benefit all parties.

**Principle 6. Use of Animals in Research: Professionals do not perform harmful research on those whom they have not established direct informed consent (nonhuman animals cannot provide informed consent).**

In keeping with the AABP's dedication to respect for the autonomy and dignity of the individual, no matter what species they belong to, the AABP sets a non-speciesist standard for the ethical use of animals (be they human or not) in research. The AABP does not differentiate between human and nonhuman except where it is demonstratively relevant. As a general rule, nonhuman animals ought to be treated similarly to children when it comes to research (because they are relevantly similar in that neither can provide informed consent for themselves). Anything that would be considered unethical to perform on a human child would be unethical to perform on a companion animal. This is a much higher standard than is common in any field that makes use of nonhuman animals so please take note of this principle.

*6.01. Professionals do not cause harm to animals that are subjects of research carried out by Professionals or for which Professionals participate. No distinction is made between humans and nonhumans in this regard. Arguments regarding how valuable the information will be are irrelevant. Note that this is a much higher standard than is common in the field. With regards to harm, broadly speaking, an animal is harmed if he or she is caused non-trivial aversion, distress, significant loss of opportunity, or behavioral, emotional or physical harm.*

This simple guideline points out that no research should be carrying out that will harm animals without their informed consent (and only most adult humans can provide informed consent). It is challenging to operationalize "harm." In the guideline above, it points to nontrivial aversion, distress, significant loss of opportunity, or behavioral, emotional or physical harm. In O'Heare (2009), harm is discussed in that context as follows:

...intrusiveness can be defined by the degree to which a procedure impacts a learner negatively, that is, causes harm in one way or another. The more problematic the side

effects an intervention is likely to generate (e.g., injury, generalized problematic emotional behavior including fear or anxiety, increased aggressive behaviors, apathy or generalized behavioral suppression, countercontrol etc.), the more harm is likely to be done and the more intrusive would the intervention be considered.

Remember that this guideline applies to research. The goal is not changing a behavior that has been resistant to nonintrusive methods and is dangerous to others, but rather to carrying out our research. Behavior change programs are an application of research methods to answering applied questions and solving real world problems, but outside of the intervention context wherein certain intrusive and potentially harmful interventions are considered for implementation based on weighing the lesser of harms, harm ought not be inflicted simply to further our understanding of the principles and processes involved. Just as we do just fine without the results of such research that could be performed on human children because it is a disrespect to the autonomy and dignity of the child to do so—that their rights trump any benefits—so too we do without these results for nonhumans. This is a just and non-speciesist position that calls on all of us to find creative ways to learn what we can from research and still maintain our ethical standards consistently.

*6.02. Full informed consent should be secured from adult human guardians of any animal used in any study by a Professional.*

In any research that professionals carry out, full informed consent ought to be sought. In the case of nonhuman animals, just like with human children, the guardian must provide the informed consent. As with children, guardians cannot consent to just any kind of treatment. Guideline 6.01. overrides guideline 6.02. Research should not harm participants who cannot provide their own informed consent.

**Principle 7. Resolving Ethical Issues: Professionals seek to objectively identify, resolve and prevent ethical dilemmas and maintain their dedication to these professional practice guidelines.**

1. There are many models available for helping professionals work through and resolve ethical dilemmas. It is beyond the scope of this document to elaborate on ethical decision making processes but I will very briefly explicate a model based largely (but not solely) on Welfel (2002):
2. Develop Ethical Sensitivity: Recognize ethical issues that arise or might arise and appreciate their importance, ideally proactively.
3. Define Dilemma and Available Options: Be thorough in identifying the competing values or principles and brainstorm all possible options for resolving the issue.

4. Refer to Professional Standards: Check various codes of ethics or professional practice guidelines that might help guide your decision. Many ethical issues can be resolved at this level, but always move to step 9.
5. Examine Applicable Laws and Regulations: If applicable, check legal regulations or consult with a lawyer for guidance.
6. Seek Ethical Scholarship: Check professional ethics textbooks or articles for guidance.
7. Apply Ethical Principles: If you cannot find specific guidelines, consider the problem in terms of basic principles: Respect for Autonomy of Individuals; Nonmaleficence (do no harm); Beneficence (do good); Justice (treating similar cases similarly); Fidelity (loyalty).
8. Consult Supervisor or Colleague: Often, we are just too close to a dilemma for objectivity and having a trusted colleague you can count on for a reality check can be valuable, whether it is in a formal supervision relationship or a consultation with a colleague, can be helpful.
9. Deliberate, Make Decision and Implement it: Consider all of the data, make a decision on how to resolve the dilemma and implement the plan.
10. Reflect. Reflecting on your handling of the dilemma will allow you to improve your ethical sensitivity and make future dilemmas easier.

*7.01. When a Professional is uncertain about whether a particular course of action would be a breach of this set of Professional Practice Guidelines, the Professional should consult other trusted Professionals or the AABP for guidance.*

Where a professional is unable to decide on a course of action to resolve ethical dilemmas, they ought to consult with a trusted colleague or contact the AABP Professional Practice Committee for guidance. The Committee is not to be feared or avoided; they are there to help professionals make wise ethical decisions as well as enforce these Professional Practice Guidelines. This may not be the case with all organizations, but is a mandate of the AABP Professional Practice Committee. Professionals ought to feel free to make use of their professional association as a resource in resolving ethical dilemmas.

*7.02. If the demands of an organization or client with which the Professional is affiliated conflicts with this set of Professional Practice Guidelines, Professionals clarify their ethical responsibilities and resolve the conflict in favor of upholding their ethical standards as outlined here.*

From time to time, employers or policies of other organizations to which the professional is also a member/employee will request the professional to perform some activity that may result in a breach of the AABP Professional Practice Guidelines. In such cases, the professional ought to clarify their professional ethical requirements and work to resolve the conflict in a way that satisfies their obligations to both parties. Where a true conflict becomes evident, the professional reasserts their obligation to adhere to these Professional Practice Guidelines even if this means dissolving the other relationship. If the professional decides that they will not adhere to these guidelines, they immediately discontinue their membership with the AABP.

**Principle 8. Aversive Stimulation: Professionals do not condone or endorse aversive stimulation that cannot be justified via the LIEBI model and do not endorse, condone or affiliate with organizations that actively promote unjustified aversive stimulation.**

The AABP and its members are dedicated to utilizing the least intrusive effective intervention possible both for philosophical and empirical reasons (see the AABP Methodological Stance near the top of this guide). The O’Heare (2009) article serves as the position of the AABP regarding when to decide on more intrusive methods or tools. It can be found at:

<http://www.associationofanimalbehaviorprofessionals.com/liebi.pdf>

This model helps ensure that the use of more intrusive methods is consistent with respect for the autonomy and dignity of all concerned.

*8.01. Professionals do not use, condone or endorse aversive tools such as, but not limited to choke chains, prong collars, electronic invisible fencing or electronic shock-collars in contravention of the LIEBI model.*

Professionals need to be extremely careful regarding not only what tools they utilize in behavior change programming but also whether they will be seen to condone or endorse them. Professionals are trained to work through careful processes such as the LIEBI model and understand the use of aversive tools in this context, but those consuming the endorsement may take an endorsement or advocacy for these tools out of context. How and when to use aversive tools should not be a topic that is avoided but the professional needs to be sensitized to the effects of endorsements or advocacy for these tools. This guideline does not forbid professionals from discussing the utilization of such tools but urges great caution in out of context endorsement or condoning of them, especially where the endorsement will likely be taken out of context. This is more likely where the general-public will have access to the endorsement but is even likely for a professional audience as well.

*8.02. Professionals do not use, condone or endorse aversive behavior change methods such as but not limited to leash corrections, helicoptering, hanging, alpha-rolling, scruff-shaking, spraying the animal in the face with fluid, throwing things at the animal, hitting in any way or otherwise creating fear or pain in animals in contravention of the LIEBI model.*

This guideline is similar to 8.02., except that it relates to procedures rather than the use of specific equipment. For most of these practices above, there is really never an appropriate application, but certainly some necessarily intrusive procedures may require the creation of fear (such as is involved in positive punishment or negative reinforcement). Again, the distinction is made between ruling out all possibility of application of certain aversive methods and the endorsement or condoning by professionals of such methods in a way that will likely be taken out of context. Any use of aversive / intrusive methods or equipment ought to be considered in the context of the LIEBI model or a similarly stringent model. But when it comes to endorsing or condoning of these methods and equipment uses, the professional must be extremely careful that it is not done so in a way that may be understood outside of the LIEBI context and used as a justification by others to use such methods or equipment outside of the LIEBI model.

*8.03. Professionals do not condone, promote, endorse or affiliate with organizations that actively promote unjustified highly intrusive/aversive methods or tools, unjustified meaning in contravention of the LIEBI model.*

Affiliating with organizations that actively promote aversive methods and tools serves to condone and even promote or endorse those methods and tools and this conflicts with the previous two guidelines. By affiliating with such organizations, one advocates for such methods and tools. It is important to note here that we are talking about organizations that actively promote such methods and tools and not about organizations that merely allow for them. There are associations and association like organizations, for which a professional may be a member that takes a broad and noncommittal stance on aversive stimulation. It is not unethical to affiliate one's self with such organizations (as long as the professional adheres to the most stringent of guidelines along the various codes of ethics and professional practice guidelines that apply to them).

## **Principle 9. Academic Ethics: Professionals maintain academic honesty.**

This principle section deals with ethics in education.

*9.01. Professionals never plagiarize; they cite sources appropriately, in any environment, where they use the words, or ideas of another individual, be it a direct quote or a paraphrase.*

It is never ethical to plagiarize the work of others. If a student considers or uses a specific source, they must cite that source appropriately. This is not simply required for direct quotes but for the consideration or use of ideas as well. Even if the source is paraphrased or the source's ideas are used, the source should be cited. Credit ought to go where credit is due. This goes also for unpublished ideas and words. Citing personal communication is important as well.

*9.02. Professionals never cheat in any form in any educational undertaking.*

Cheating involves any activity wherein a student creates an unfair advantage. Although there will be grey areas, many obvious forms of cheating exist. Any student who cheats, either for himself or herself or another student, is acting unethically.

**Principle 10. Professional Boundaries: Professionals work with clients to change specific behaviors and avoid performing veterinary medical care or human counseling services unless they are licensed as appropriate.**

The AABP has a position statement on professional boundaries at:

<http://www.associationofanimalbehaviorprofessionals.com/boundaryissues.html>

Of interest will also be:

<http://www.associationofanimalbehaviorprofessionals.com/theoreticorientation.html>

These provide a good introduction to the next guideline.

*10.01. Professionals do not perform veterinary services without a veterinary medical license. Professionals do not "diagnose," provide a "prognosis" or "treatment" for any medical condition and avoid use of the terms "diagnosis" or "prognosis" with regards to behavior in order to avoid confusion of the professional's services with medical services.*

It goes without saying that unless one is a veterinarian, it does not matter what else they do; they should not be performing veterinary medical care without a license. The part most worthy of comment is the use of medical terms in working with behavior. Behavior is not disease and treating them as analogous is not as useful as treating behavior as behavior, distinct from analogies with diseases. The field of behavior analysis approaches behavior not from a disease-analogy standpoint but from the standpoint of behavior itself. Although many trainers and behavior consultants continue to utilize the medical model approach to behavior, AABP urges professionals to avoid such approaches and operate from a behavior analytic standpoint. In order to prevent crossing professional boundaries or inadvertently allowing some to believe veterinary medical care is being provided, the AABP urges the professional to avoid medical terminology, in particular, the terms “diagnosis” and “prognosis.” We do not posit underlying psychological syndromes as the cause of the behavior or make broad generalizations but rather make specific statements regarding the contingencies involved in specific behaviors in specific instances. In other words, we describe actual behaviors in actual instances rather than making a “diagnosis.” Although we may discuss likely outcomes, we are not providing a “prognosis.” The word “treatment” may also be avoided, but at this time, the term treatment is used by behavior analysts as well as veterinarians and is not included among terms to be avoided.

*10.02. Professionals, who are not also licensed veterinarians, do not treat any medical conditions, including but not limited to disease or injury, except in emergency first aid situations as is allowed by law.*

The only exception to the guideline not to provide medical care without a veterinary medical license is not really medical care at all. The Good Samaritan rule exists in most places that allows those who are not medical professionals to render first aid to injured animals.

*10.03. Professionals, who are not also licensed veterinarians, do not advise clients on prescription medications in such a way that may be seen as "prescribing" and where considering nonprescription substances (including but not limited to dietary supplements or additives), Professionals recommend that the use be reviewed by a veterinarian, veterinary nutritionist or other qualified nutrition consultants as appropriate before being implemented.*

One major reason why some veterinary behaviorists take a generally dim view of nonveterinarians carrying out behavior consultation services (other than utilizing veterinary medical terminology) is the practice by some behavior consultants to make medication recommendations to clients. Behavior consultants who are not also veterinarians are not competent to “prescribe” medications (or surgical procedures). Professionals are often familiar with certain medications and surgical procedures and their effects on behavior. Where a behavior consultant makes a recommendation

regarding medication it ought to be a recommendation for the client to discuss it with a veterinarian with an offer to collaborate with the veterinarian, the professional addressing the monitoring of the target behaviors, and the client and their veterinarian addressing whether it is an appropriate medication for the animal and any other medically related issues pertaining to the use of the medication. It is not generally inappropriate to recommend consideration of specific medications but it will be the veterinarian and client who will decide the matter.

There are certain non-medication supplements that professionals may wish to suggest, but the recommendation should always be accompanied by the recommendation to have a veterinarian review the recommendation. Tryptophan, 5-HTP, vitamin B6 and melatonin are common examples.

*10.04. Professionals, who are not also Board Certified Veterinary Behaviorists or Certified Applied Animal Behaviorists, do not refer to themselves as “behaviorists” in order to avoid confusing the consultant’s services with that of these allied professions. Professionals, who are not certified as behavior analysts, do not refer to themselves as “behavior analysts.”*

Although the term behaviorist is not a regulated term unless it is accompanied by the other words in the regulated phrases above, and even then, only in certain locations, it is likely to mislead consumers regarding the orientation or credentials of the professional. Because of this likelihood of misleading the public and because it is similar to terms used by these other organizations, it is generally best for professionals who are not certified by these organizations to avoid referring to one’s self as a behaviorist. Behavior Specialist is more appropriate, although trainer or behavior consultant may be most appropriate.

*10.05. Professionals, who are not also licensed human mental health professionals, do not provide mental health counseling to clients beyond effective consultation/communication practices.*

Just as professionals who are not veterinarians must not practice veterinary medicine, so too should professionals who are not also licensed human mental health providers avoid performing any services, which may be construed as counseling of the human client. Of course, professionals work with humans in order to achieve behavioral objectives in companion animals that involve effective communication tactics. This is not to be confused for actual mental health care provision.

**Principle 11. Upholding Professionalism: Professionals report observed breeches of these guidelines by fellow AABP members.**

Professionals take responsibility for maintaining high ethical standards in their field. It is not ethical to ignore unethical behavior in colleagues. Unethical behavior harms not only clients but also the field as a whole.

*11.01. Professionals who become aware of a fellow professional member in breach of these professional practice guidelines reports the violation to the AABP.*

In order to maintain the integrity of the field as a whole and the AABP association credibility specifically, members who become aware of violations of these guidelines by other members report the violation to the AABP Professional Practices Committee.

**References**

O’Heare, J. (2009), The least intrusive effective behavior intervention (LIEBI) algorithm and levels of intrusiveness table: A proposed best practices model. *Journal of Applied Companion Animal Behavior*. 3, xxx-xxx (in press).

Welfel, E. R. (2002). *Ethics in counseling and psychotherapy Standards, research, and emerging issues* (2nd. ed.). Pacific Grove: Brooks / Cole.

**Recommended Reading**

Bailey, J. S., & Burch, M. R. (2005). *Ethics for Behavior Analysts: A Practical Guide to the Behavior Analyst Certification board Guidelines for Responsible Conduct*: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.