

How to find a behavior expert.

You may need help with basic training or for a more serious dog behavior concern. Regardless, you want to work with a qualified professional who uses humane, evidence-based methods.

If you are experiencing a problematic behavior with your dog, the first step is a veterinary check-up. Rule out medical issues before assuming the issue is strictly behavioral. Once your dog has been deemed healthy, it's time to find a behavior professional.

Behavior professionals can:

- Assess your dog and their behavior or training needs
- Help you identify environmental changes that may help your dog
- Guide you on evidence-based, humane, behavior modification techniques
- Provide you with a plan to help your dog
- Refer you to another professional if needed



What type of behavior professional do I need?

If your dog is experiencing a sudden change in behavior, or has issues with severe fear and aggression, you will likely want to work with an academically-trained behaviorist (a veterinary behaviorist or certified applied animal behaviorist) or a behavior consultant.

If your dog has minor behavior issues, or needs help with basic training, a dog trainer is likely your best first step.

Questions to ask

Before hiring a behavior professional, you want to know a bit about them. In many cases, this information will be readily available on their website. Here are some good questions to ask:

- What is their education? What credentials do they have?
- Are they a member of a professional organization? If so, which one(s)?
- Do they participate in continuing education?
- What is their training philosophy and what training methods do they use?
- Do they have references?



Look for behaviorists, consultants, and trainers who use force-free, positive reinforcement-based training methods. These methods are evidence-based, most effective, most humane, and support good welfare for dogs. Your behavior professional should stay up to date with their education, and work with colleagues as members of one or more professional organizations.



CAUTION: Be aware of trainers who describe themselves as “balanced trainers.” They typically include punishment-based techniques, which we do not recommend. Punishment-based techniques include electronic/shock collars, leash corrections/jerks, and hitting a dog. Trainers who are focused on dominance theory or “pack leadership” are also utilizing methods that are not evidence-based or current.



For more on recommended training methods, see our handout [Basic Training for Kenneled Dogs](#).



Does your dog need behavior medication?

In some cases, your primary veterinarian may prescribe medications for your dog, such as an anti-anxiety medication. A veterinary behaviorist is also able to prescribe medication for your dog. Medications are commonly used if a dog is experiencing severe anxiety, may be at risk of harming themselves or others, or when behavior modification alone is unlikely to change behavior.

Finding a behavior professional

These are organizations that have specific requirements which may include education, experience, and exams/assessments. Inclusion of these organizations does not indicate an endorsement of any professionals listed in these directories.

Note: There is no regulation of behavior consultants.

Academically-trained behaviorists

The term “veterinary behaviorist (DACVB)” refers to a veterinarian who has completed a behavior residency and exam.



The term “Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist (CAAB)” refers to a behaviorist with an advanced degree (DVM, PhD, MA, MS) in a related field.



Certified behavior consultants

A behavior consultant offers services including guidance on behavior modification and training.



Certified Dog Behavior Consultants (CDBC; International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants) must pass an exam and maintain continuing education hours.



Certified Behavior Consultant Canine-Knowledge Assessed (CCBC-KA) must pass a 3-hour exam covering behavior analysis, best practices, ethology and health.

Veterinary Technician Specialist in Behavior

A VTS – behavior is a licensed veterinary technician. They must pass an exam and meet continuing education requirements. VTS-behavior technicians also submit case reports and case logs before certification.

Dog trainers

The Certification Council for Pet Dog Trainers certifies dog trainers as Knowledge Assessed (exam) or Knowledge and Skills Assessed (also requires a video assessment).

Accredited Dog Trainers (IAABC-ADT) are dog trainers who show knowledge and skill in animal behavior and training.

Fear Free Animal Trainers must pass an online course and be certified or trained under an approved list of programs (e.g., DACVB, CAABs, CPDT-KA).

