

## Important Information On Choosing Feline Trainers & Consultants



Training for cats is a relatively new area that is becoming popular with cat owners who wish to provide their cats with daily enrichment and increase the human animal bond.

Whether you are looking for someone to help with behavioural concerns, or want to train your cat to do tricks or even work in the movies, choosing your trainer is important.

As is the case with trainers who specialize in other species, you want to be sure that you choose a trainer with adequate knowledge in what makes a cat tick, as well as scientifically sound training education. Further, you want to be sure that the trainer you hire follows a

humane hierarchy in their training approach and adheres to a least intrusive, minimally aversive (LIMA) approach to teaching your cat new behaviours.

While training is mostly unregulated, meaning that anyone can call themselves an animal trainer, look for certification or affiliation with an organization such as the International Association of Animal Behaviour Consultants or at the very least, someone who has significant education at a post secondary level in animal behaviour or ethology.

At the Toronto Humane Society, we are proud to have Dr. Jacklyn Ellis, MRes, PhD, CAAB on staff. Dr. Ellis leads a group of talented feline trainers and is a certified applied animal behaviorist – one of a small handful of elite professionals who have achieved that highest level of certification. All animal trainers at the Toronto Humane Society adhere to the humane hierarchy outlined by the International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants which is outlined as follows (Source: <https://m.iaabc.org/about/lima/hierarchy/>)

### Purpose

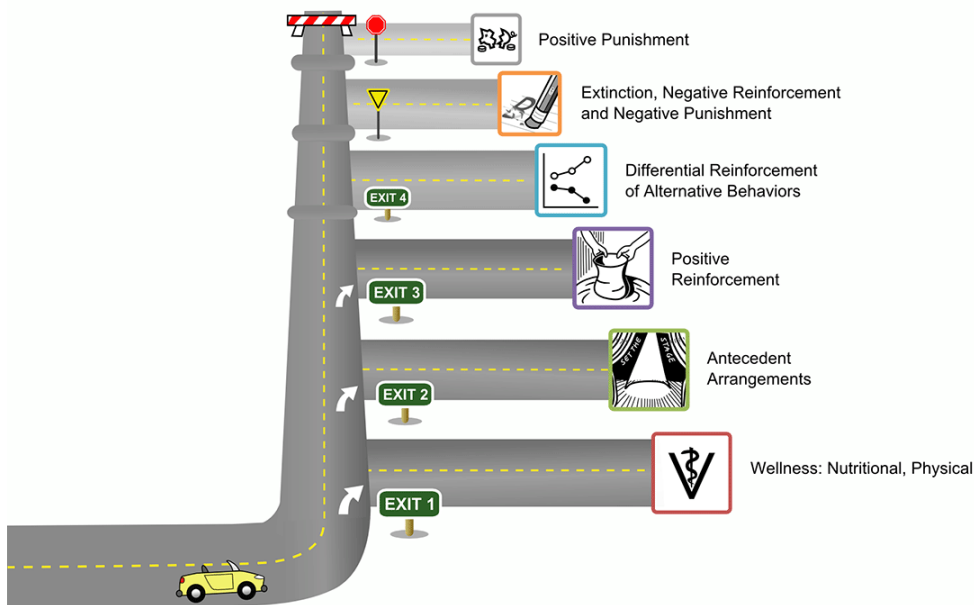
The Humane Hierarchy serves to guide professionals in their decision-making process during training and behavior modification. Additionally, it assists owners and animal care professionals in understanding the standard of care to be applied in determining training practices and methodologies and the order of implementation for applying those training practices and methodologies.

### Hierarchy of Procedures for Humane and Effective Practice

1. **Health, nutritional, and physical factors:** Ensure that any indicators for possible medical, nutritional, or health factors are addressed by a licensed veterinarian. The consultant should also address potential factors in the physical environment.
2. **Antecedents:** Redesign setting events, change motivations, and add or remove discriminative stimuli (cues) for the problem behavior.
3. **Positive Reinforcement:** Employ approaches that contingently deliver a consequence to increase the probability that the desired behavior will occur.

4. **Differential Reinforcement of Alternative Behavior:** Reinforce an acceptable replacement behavior and remove the maintaining reinforcer for the problem behavior.
5. **Negative Punishment, Negative Reinforcement, or Extinction (these are not listed in any order of preference):**
  - a. Negative Punishment - Contingently withdraw a positive reinforcer to reduce the probability that the problem behavior will occur.
  - b. Negative Reinforcement - Contingently withdraw an aversive antecedent stimulus to increase the probability that the right behavior will occur.
  - c. Extinction - Permanently remove the maintaining reinforcer to suppress the behavior or reduce it to baseline levels.
6. **Positive Punishment:** Contingently deliver an aversive consequence to reduce the probability that the problem behavior will occur.

**Hierarchy of Behavior-Change Procedures**  
**Most Positive, Least Intrusive Effective Intervention**



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**Useful Terms**

\* Intrusiveness refers to the degree to which the learner has counter control. The goal of LIMA is for its trainers/consultants to determine and use the least intrusive effective intervention which will effectively address the target behavior. In the course of an experienced trainer/consultant's practice, he or she may identify a situation in which a relatively more intrusive procedure is necessary for an effective outcome. In such a case, a procedure that reduces the learner's control may be the least intrusive, effective choice. Additionally, wellness is at the top of the hierarchy to ensure that a trainer/consultant does not implement a learning solution for behavior problems due to pain or illness. The hierarchy is a cautionary tool to reduce both dogmatic rule following and practice by familiarity or convenience. It offers an ethical checkpoint for consultants to carefully consider the process by which effective outcomes can be most humanely achieved on a case-by-case basis. Rationale like, "It worked with the last case!" is not appropriate. The evaluation and behavior change program of every animal should be a study of the individual (i.e., individual animal, setting, caregiver, etc.). Changing behavior is best understood as a study of one.