

STANDARDS OF PRACTICE & CODE OF ETHICS

For Toronto Humane Society Certified Dog Training Instructors

1. Purpose & Professional Commitment

Intent: Establish the shared ethical foundation and expectations for Toronto Humane Society Certified Dog Training Instructors.

- Certified Dog Training Instructors commit to promoting animal welfare, client safety, and ethical, evidence-based behaviour change

Certified Dog Training Instructors agree to uphold these standards:

- The welfare of the animal, the human, and the human–animal relationship is prioritized in all professional decisions

2. Humane, Evidence-Based Training Practices

Intent: Anchor practice in learning theory and the hierarchy of behaviour-change procedures.

Certified Dog Training Instructors will adhere to the Hierarchy for Behavior-Change Procedures, prioritizing:

- Health, physical, and environmental factors
- Management and antecedent strategies
- Reinforcement-based skill building
- Least intrusive, minimally aversive interventions only when ethically justified and within scope

Training plans must be defensible, proportional, and designed to minimize risk, fear, pain, or distress.

3. Prohibited and Restricted Practices

Intent: Clearly define boundaries around aversive tools and methods.

Certified Dog Training Instructors shall avoid the use of aversive tools or techniques, including but not limited to:

- Shock/electronic collars
- Prong or pinch collars

- Choke chains
- Techniques intended to startle, intimidate, or cause pain or fear

Certified Dog Training Instructors may not recommend, demonstrate, or refer clients to services that rely on such tools under the trainer's certification.

Certified Dog Training Instructors may work with clients who are already using aversive tools or techniques with a goal to provide alternative effective and humane strategies rooted in positive reinforcement interventions to help guide clients to less aversive solutions. This approach is grounded in the principles of harm reduction and relationship building. At no time will Certified Dog Training Instructors introduce, recommend, or implement aversive tools as a part of their training intervention.

4. Scope of Practice & Professional Boundaries

Intent: Prevent harm through role clarity and appropriate referral.

Certified Dog Training Instructors will work only within their scope of experience, training, and judgment.

Certified Dog Training Instructors will not:

- Diagnose medical or behavioural disorders
- Provide veterinary, or psychological advice

Certified Dog Training Instructors will refer clients to qualified professionals (e.g., veterinarians, veterinary behaviourists, A/CAABs, IAABC consultants) when behaviour concerns involve severe aggression, fear, or potential welfare compromise that the trainer determines require additional expertise, collaboration, or referral.

Certified Dog Training Instructors are encouraged to regularly reflect on their own experience, training, and comfort level, and to seek additional education, consultation, or referral when a situation extends beyond what they feel equipped to handle safely and ethically.

5. Transparency & Informed Consent

Intent: Ensure clients understand what they are agreeing to and why.

Certified Dog Training Instructors must clearly and honestly disclose:

- Training methods and underlying principles
- Expected outcomes and realistic limitations

- Potential risks and benefits of proposed approaches

Clients must have the opportunity to ask questions and give informed consent before training begins.

Certified Dog Training Instructors will not misrepresent methods, credentials, or outcomes.

6. Client Communication, Claims & Guarantees

Intent: Prevent misleading marketing and false expectations.

Certified Dog Training Instructors will not:

- Make guarantees of specific outcomes or timelines
- Claim to “fix,” “cure,” or permanently eliminate behaviour
- Present anecdotal success as scientific proof

All public statements, marketing materials, and client communications must be accurate, honest, and evidence-aligned.

7. Ongoing Education & Professional Development

Intent: Maintain competence and relevance in a changing field.

Certified Dog Training Instructors commit to ongoing continuing education in:

- Learning theory and behavioural science
- Animal welfare and ethics
- Species-specific behaviour and husbandry

Certified Dog Training Instructors are responsible for staying current with evolving best practices and research.

8. Confidentiality & Client Privacy

Intent: Protect client trust and personal information.

Certified Dog Training Instructors will maintain the confidentiality of:

- Client identities
- Personal information
- Training records and case details

Client information may only be shared with:

- Explicit client consent
- Other professionals involved in the case (with consent)
- Legal obligation where required by law

Case studies or media use must anonymize clients and animals unless written permission is provided.

9. Professional Conduct & Accountability

Intent: Set guidelines for behaviour within the profession.

Certified Dog Training Instructors will conduct themselves professionally and respectfully toward:

- Clients
- Colleagues
- Other professionals

Certified Dog Training Instructors will not disparage clients or colleagues publicly or privately.

References:

- American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior. (2021). Position statement on humane dog training. <https://avsab.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/AVSAB-Humane-Dog-Training-Position-Statement-2021.pdf>
- International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants. (n.d.). Joint Standards of Practice. In Standards of Practice. IAABC. Retrieved January 6, 2026, from <https://iaabc.org/standards-of-practice>
- Friedman, S. G. (2020). Why animals need trainers who adhere to a procedural hierarchy: Improving animal welfare and honing trainers' skills. BehaviorWorks. <https://www.behaviorworks.org/files/articles/Why%20Animals%20Need%20Trainers%20Who%20Adhere%20to%20a%20Procedural%20Hierarchy.pdf>