

Association of Pet Dog Trainers

Position Statement

Adopted July 8, 2009

The following statement reflects the opinion of the Association of Pet Dog Trainers.

The Association of Pet Dog Trainers recognizes that dog training is a continuum ranging from unacceptably harsh methods to training that uses primarily positive reinforcement. We understand and agree that individual members of the APDT are free to choose the training methods and tools that they use in their training programs.

The APDT also recognizes that scientific studies have found that it is possible to effectively train animals using positive reinforcement and negative punishment.

Through its vision and mission statements the APDT is committed to using and advocating for training techniques that are “dog-friendly.”

The APDT acknowledges that no generally accepted definition of dog-friendly currently exists.

Therefore, the APDT hereby defines dog-friendly as used in our mission and vision statements to mean:

“Dog-friendly training is training that utilizes primarily positive reinforcement; secondarily negative punishment, and only occasionally, rarely, and/or as a last resort includes positive punishment and/or negative reinforcement.”

Application of the Humane Hierarchy

Purpose: This position statement serves to guide certificants of the Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers (CCPDT) in the decision making process during dog training and behavior modification. Additionally, it will assist dog owners and dog care professionals in understanding the standard of care to be applied in the dog training industry in determining training practices and methodologies and the order of implementation for applying those training practices and methodologies.

Position of the CCPDT: The standard of care for CCPDT certificants is that the Humane Hierarchy be used when making decisions regarding training protocols and behavior interventions. This use should occur regardless of whether the certificant is performing the training or setting up a protocol for the dog owner or another professional to implement.

The Humane Hierarchy, as adopted by the CCPDT, is as follows:

Hierarchy of Procedures for Humane and Effective Practices¹

1. Health, nutritional, and physical factors: The certificant should ensure that any indicators for possible medical, nutritional, or health factors are addressed by a licensed veterinarian. The certificant should also ensure that potential factors in the physical environment are addressed.
2. Antecedents: The certificant should redesign setting events, change motivations, and add or remove discriminative stimuli (cues) for the problem behavior.
3. Positive Reinforcement: The certificant should employ approaches that contingently deliver a consequence to increase the probability that the right behavior will occur, which is more reinforcing than the problem behavior.
4. Differential Reinforcement of Alternate Behavior: The certificant should 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 – The certificant should contingently withdraw a positive reinforcer to reduce the probability that the problem behavior will occur.
 - b. Negative Reinforcement - The certificant should contingently withdraw an aversive antecedent stimulus to increase the probability that the right behavior will occur.
 - c. Extinction - The certificant should permanently remove the maintaining reinforcer to suppress the behavior or reduce it to baseline levels.
6. Positive Punishment: The certificant should contingently deliver an aversive consequence to reduce the probability that the problem behavior will occur.