



Certification Council for  
Professional Dog Trainers®

## Prohibited Practices Policy

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### Introduction

The Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers® (CCPDT®) is dedicated to advancing the field of professional dog training and behavior consulting by establishing and maintaining industry-recognized baseline standards for certification, continuing education, and ethical practices. By implementing an independent, psychometrically sound certification process, the CCPDT enhances professionalism and credibility within the dog training community, safeguards consumers by identifying qualified professionals, and fosters a commitment to ethical practices and ongoing professional development among our certificants.

Demonstrating professional competence through psychometrically sound certification examinations remains the cornerstone for maintaining the profession's integrity, preventing poor welfare outcomes, protecting the public from unqualified professionals, and empowering certificants to exercise independent, timely, and ethical professional judgment in the best interest of their clients.

CCPDT certificants offer services across various practice areas, aiming to positively impact the lives of dogs, their owners or caretakers, and their communities. The CCPDT fosters ethical behavior in the profession by establishing objective certification eligibility and maintenance requirements, adopting the ethical standards outlined in the Prohibited Practices Policy, and enforcing these standards in instances of professional misconduct as specified in the Certification and Disciplinary Procedures policy.

The CCPDT supports effective, humane, practical, and outcome-driven training strategies that are consistently informed by evolving science and real-world experience, bridging the gap between academic theory and practical application. The Prohibited Practices Policy guides the professional activities of CCPDT certificants. The policy also provides a way for certificants to evaluate their behavior and for others to assess whether a CCPDT-certified dog trainer or behavior consultant has violated their ethical obligations.

### Purpose

This policy defines specific training practices and tools that are strictly prohibited for CCPDT certificants, candidates, and board members in all professional activities, including but not limited to direct service delivery, consultation, supervision, and training. The purpose of this policy is to safeguard dog welfare, maintain professional integrity, and establish clear guidelines that align with humane and effective training principles.

While this policy may not address every controversial practice in the dog training industry, it categorically prohibits techniques and tools that are deemed harmful, inhumane, or unjustifiable compared to available alternatives.

### Policy Considerations

In developing these standards, the CCPDT carefully evaluated the welfare implications of various training tools and practices, drawing on scientific research, industry best practices, and the ethical responsibilities of professional

trainers. The prohibited practices in this policy reflect a commitment to safeguarding dog welfare, ensuring the effectiveness of training approaches, and maintaining the professional integrity of CCPDT certificants. These prohibitive practices support policies designed to prioritize community safety, foster client trust, protect the well-being of dogs, and uphold the credibility of the profession. They safeguard the reputation of CCPDT certificants, align with contemporary training practices, and strengthen relationships with clients, colleagues, and the wider community.

### Scope

This policy applies to all CCPDT certificants, candidates, and board members in every aspect of their professional conduct, irrespective of setting or mode of delivery (e.g., in-person, virtual, or written communication).

### Glossary:

As used in the Code and throughout CCPDT policies, positions, and practices, the following definitions are applied:

- **Electronic Training Collar:** A collar that delivers a static pulse stimulus.
- **Head Collar:** A collar designed to fit around a dog's muzzle and behind the ears.
- **Prong Collar:** A collar with interlocking links that rest against the dog's neck.
- **Slip Collar:** A collar designed to tighten around a dog's neck when tension is applied.

### Prohibited Practices

Any training equipment, method, technique, tool, or behavioral intervention strategy that leads to sustained or prolonged signs of fear, stress, or discomfort is strictly prohibited. Certificants must discontinue using equipment, tools, or practices that the dog cannot adapt to or build resilience toward, recognizing that a learning phase may involve temporary signs of stress. Such practices have the potential to cause long-term emotional and behavioral harm, including increased anxiety, increased aggression, and chronic stress.

The following practices are expressly forbidden for CCPDT candidates, certificants, and board members in all professional contexts:

- **Alpha Rolls or Pinning:** Forcing a dog onto its back or physically holding it down to assert dominance.
- **Collar & Leash Corrections:** Jerking or yanking a leash or collar to redirect a dog's attention, correct undesired behavior, or enforce compliance is prohibited. This includes using such corrections to teach new skills or as the primary method in proofing exercises, applying them with such frequency, force, or duration that they cause observable physical harm or psychological distress, or using them when the dog displays clear signs of anxiety, fear, or confusion, which may exacerbate the dog's emotional or mental state.
- **Dominance-Based Language:** Interpreting or communicating dog behavior through the lens of debunked dominance hierarchies or alpha theory.
- **Ear Pinch:** Using pinching pressure with the hand or a tool to force compliance in obedience training or retrieving exercises.
- **Electronic Training Collars (E-Collars):** Using electronic training collars is prohibited for dogs under one (1) year of age. Their use is not permitted to teach foundational skills, such as basic obedience cues, or for addressing aggression, anxiety, fears, or phobias. Certificants must avoid using electronic training collars in any training situation that does not pose safety risks to the dog, their owner or caretaker, or the broader community.

Trainers must demonstrate competence in the safe and effective use of electronic training collars through documented education, such as participation in mentorship programs or hands-on workshops. Only one electronic training collar may be used on a dog at a time, and stimulation must be applied exclusively to the neck.

Certificants must continuously monitor dogs for signs of stress or distress, including physical indicators such as excessive scratching or pawing at the collar, wide eyes ("whale eye"), pinned ears, tail tucking, or a stiff body posture. Behavioral signs can include vocalizations like yelping, whining, or barking, as well as freezing, avoidance behaviors, reluctance to move or engage, or attempts to escape or remove the collar. Physiological signs, such as excessive drooling, dilated pupils, increased heart rate, or panting unrelated to physical exertion, must also be observed and addressed promptly.

An electronic training collar must be discontinued if the dog shows signs of distress or fails to demonstrate a clear, consistent understanding of how to avoid or respond to the collar. Certificants must implement a structured conditioning process, ensuring the dog and its owner or caretaker are educated on the collar's operation and purpose. Behavior Change Plans must include a documented rationale for the collar's use, potential risks associated with using the collar, a step-by-step outline of the conditioning and training process, and a plan to reduce reliance on the collar over time. All applications must comply with the CCPDT Standards of Practice, Code of Ethics, and Position Statement on Behavior Change Procedures.

- **Flooding:** Exposing a dog to fear-inducing stimuli at full intensity to force habituation.
- **Food or Water Deprivation:** It is strictly prohibited to deprive a dog of essential sustenance to coerce compliance or increase motivation during training. Including a dog's daily meals in a structured behavior change plan is acceptable.
- **Forced Submission or Restraint:** Forcing a dog into a submissive posture or using physical restraint that causes the dog to display signs of fear, pain, or distress.
- **Head Collar:** Applying forceful or abrupt pressure, such as yanking, jerking, or sharply pulling the leash, when using a head collar is prohibited.

Certificants must monitor dogs for signs of stress or distress. Indicators may include excessive pawing or scratching at the head or face, frequent yawning or lip licking, pinned ears, wide eyes (commonly called "whale eye"), tail tucking, or a stiff body posture. Behavioral signs include reluctance to move, freezing, avoidance behaviors, vocalizations (e.g., whining, crying), or persistent attempts to remove the collar (e.g., rubbing against objects or the ground). Physiological signs include excessive drooling, dilated pupils, increased heart rate, or panting unrelated to exertion.

A head collar must be discontinued if the dog shows signs of distress or fails to demonstrate a clear, consistent understanding of how to avoid or respond to the collar. Certificants must implement a structured conditioning process, ensuring the dog and its owner or caretaker are educated on the head collar's operation and purpose. Behavior Change Plans must include a documented explanation for the collar's use, potential risks associated with the use of the collar, a step-by-step outline of the conditioning and training process, and a plan to reduce reliance on the collar over time. All applications must comply with the CCPDT Standards of Practice, Code of Ethics, and Position Statement on Behavior Change Procedures.

- **Helicoptering:** Lifting a dog by its collar or leash and either holding it suspended or swinging it around.

- **Intimidation Tactics:** Methods intended to frighten or overwhelm a dog, including yelling or threatening postures in non-emergency situations.
- **Restricted Air Flow:** Any practice that restricts the airflow with a collar or leash.
- **Physical Punishment:** Using physical force, including but not limited to bonking, hitting, kicking, muzzle grabbing, scruff shaking, or smacking.
- **Prong Collar:** Prong collars are prohibited for dogs under six months of age or as a primary tool for teaching new behaviors.

Certificants must monitor dogs for signs of stress or distress. These may include excessive scratching or pawing at the collar, wide eyes ("whale eye"), pinned ears, tail tucking, or a stiff body posture. Behavioral indicators such as vocalizations (e.g., yelping, whining, barking), reluctance to walk or move, freezing, avoidance behaviors, or attempts to escape or remove the collar should also be observed. Physiological signs include excessive drooling, dilated pupils, increased heart rate, or panting unrelated to exertion. If the dog does not show a clear and consistent ability to respond appropriately to the prong collar, or if there are any signs of prolonged fear, stress, or discomfort, its use should be stopped immediately.

The use of a prong collar must be discontinued if the dog shows signs of distress or fails to demonstrate a clear, consistent understanding of how to avoid or respond to the collar. Certificants must implement a structured conditioning process, ensuring the dog and its owner/caretaker are educated on the collar's operation and purpose. Behavior Change Plans must include a documented rationale for the collar's use, potential risks associated with the use of the collar, a step-by-step outline of the conditioning and training process, and a plan to reduce reliance on the collar over time. All applications must comply with the CCPDT Standards of Practice, Code of Ethics, and Position Statement on Behavior Change Procedures.

- **Sensory Deprivation:** Practices that isolate a dog from normal sensory stimuli in a manner that causes undue stress or fear, such as prolonged confinement in dark or restrictive spaces.
- **Slip Collar:** Applying forceful or abrupt pressure, such as yanking, jerking, or sharply pulling the leash when using a slip collar is strictly prohibited.

Certificants must monitor dogs for signs of stress or distress. Indicators may include excessive pawing or scratching at the collar, frequent yawning or lip licking, pinned ears, wide eyes (commonly called "whale eye"), tail tucking, or a stiff body posture. Behavioral signs include reluctance to move, freezing, avoidance behaviors, vocalizations (e.g., whining, crying), or persistent attempts to remove the collar (e.g., rubbing against objects or the ground). Physiological signs include excessive drooling, dilated pupils, increased heart rate, or panting unrelated to exertion.

A slip collar must be discontinued if the dog shows signs of distress or fails to demonstrate a clear, consistent understanding of how to avoid or respond to the collar. Certificants must implement a structured conditioning process, ensuring the dog and its owner/caretaker are educated on the slip collar's operation and purpose. Behavior Change Plans must include a documented explanation for the collar's use, potential risks associated with using the collar, a step-by-step outline of the conditioning and training process, and a plan to reduce reliance on the collar over time. All applications must comply with the CCPDT Standards of Practice, Code of Ethics, and Position Statement on Behavior Change Procedures.

- **Startle Tools:** Trainers are not permitted to throw or toss any object at a dog intending to interrupt, correct, or modify behavior, except when the trainer is responding to an immediate safety risk.

### **Accountability for Certificants in Violation**

Certificants alleged to violate any CCPDT policy, position, or practice are subject to review according to the procedures outlined in the Certification and Disciplinary Procedures.

### **Conclusion**

The CCPDT is committed to advancing the dog training profession by establishing and enforcing clear, enforceable standards of ethical practice. This policy ensures that certificants follow methods that protect dog welfare, foster trust, and uphold the credibility of the training profession. By prioritizing reinforcement-based techniques and addressing harmful practices, the CCPDT strengthens its mission to elevate the standards of professionalism and competence in dog training.

Adopted 4/17/25