



Certification Council for
Professional Dog Trainers®

Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics

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 these Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics, 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 Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics (Code) guide the professional activities of CCPDT certificants. The Code 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.

Scope of the Code

The Code applies to all individuals who hold a CCPDT certification (CPDT-KA®, CPDT-KSA®, CBCC-KA®) or have completed a CCPDT certification application. For the sake of efficiency, the term "certificant" is used throughout this document to refer to those who must act in accordance with the Code. The CCPDT does not have authority over dog trainers who are not currently certified through our organization.

The Code governs the professional activities of certificants, encompassing direct service delivery, consultation, supervision, training, management, and other roles in the dog training profession. It dictates certificants' conduct

in all settings and methods of delivery, including in-person interactions, written communication, phone calls, social media, emails, text messages, and video conferencing. The Code pertains to certificants' personal behavior only when it directly affects their professional responsibilities or poses a potential risk to the health, safety, or welfare of clients, dogs, the community, supervisees, or trainees. This includes situations where a certificant's personal behavior related to their own dogs, such as neglect, mistreatment, or employing training practices inconsistent with the Code, might reasonably raise concerns about their ability to maintain ethical practices in their professional activities.

Enforcement of the Code

The standards outlined in the Code are not exhaustive, as it is impossible to predict every scenario that could constitute an ethics violation. Therefore, the absence of specific behaviors or actions from these standards does not imply that such behavior is ethical or unethical. The interpretation and application of the standards require careful attention to their wording, intent, and the core principles they embody. Each situation must be assessed practically, considering all relevant factors. Certificants are expected to be knowledgeable about and comply with the Code. A lack of awareness or misunderstanding of this Code cannot be used as a defense against allegations of ethical misconduct.

The Certification Compliance and Disciplinary Procedures outline the CCPDT's process for addressing ethical misconduct. Certificants who are found to be in violation of the Code may face disciplinary actions, including, but not limited to, supervision periods, required continuing education, suspension or revocation of certification, withdrawal of candidate application approval, or other sanctions as determined by the CCPDT.

Ethical Decision-Making

Certificants will inevitably face complex ethical dilemmas that require careful consideration and adherence to the principles outlined in the CCPDT Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics. Trainers should approach these situations by systematically identifying problems, evaluating potential solutions, and ensuring that decisions align with both core principles and specific professional standards. Ethical decision-making involves a thorough assessment of the full context of the situation and the relevant ethical standards.

Certificants must prioritize the safety and well-being of the community, followed by the best interests of their clients, while striving to meet dogs' needs and enhance their overall well-being. This commitment includes maximizing the use of reinforcement-based training strategies, minimizing reliance on punishment-based methods, and ensuring no harm is done. In all cases, decision-making should be guided by the ethical principles outlined in the Code, ensuring adherence to both its letter and spirit.

Glossary

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

- **Agency:** The ability to exert control and overcome challenges in one's environment to gather knowledge and enhance skills for future use.
- **Aversive:** Any stimulus, including training equipment, behavioral intervention strategies, or environmental factors, the dog seeks to avoid or escape.
- **Certification Period:** The time when a CCPDT certificant's credentials are valid, starting from the award date and ending on the expiration date, unless renewed.
- **Choice:** the act of choosing or selecting from more than one favorable alternative.

- **Collaborative Team:** A certified or licensed dog trainer or behavior consultant, veterinarian, veterinary behaviorist, or other specialists who collaborate to guide training decisions.
- **Conditioning Process:** Preparing dogs and their owners or caretakers to use training equipment safely and effectively by systematically introducing the equipment to teach the dog how to avoid aversive elements.
- **Control:** the ability to predictably and effectively produce desired results in a given situation.
- **Dog Behavior Consultant:** A dog behavior consultant is a dog trainer with advanced expertise in behavior modification who specializes in resolving behavioral problems, including aggression, fear, phobias, and anxiety.
- **Dog Trainer:** A dog trainer teaches dogs fundamental skills and desirable behaviors, addresses common behavioral challenges, and helps owners or caretakers implement strategies to prevent and manage undesired behaviors. Trainers may also specialize in preparing dogs for specific roles, such as service work, therapy, sports, or other specialized tasks.
- **Prolonged Exposure:** Extended or continuous exposure to a specific stimulus or situation over an extended period, leading to distress.
- **Punishment-Based Training Strategy:** a dog training or behavioral intervention strategy intended to decrease an undesired behavior by primarily using positive punishment.
- **Qualified Professional:** certified or licensed dog trainer, behavior consultant, veterinarian, veterinary behaviorist, or other specialist.
- **Reinforcement-Based Training Strategy:** a dog training or behavioral intervention strategy intended to increase a desired behavior or change the dog's emotional response to a situation by primarily using positive reinforcement.
- **Training Equipment:** Any tools, devices, or apparatus used to assist in teaching, managing, or modifying a dog's behavior. This includes items designed to facilitate communication, reinforce desired behaviors, ensure safety, or prevent undesired behaviors during training sessions. Examples include harnesses, head collars, martingale collars, muzzles, prong collars, slip collars, and electronic training collars.
- **Well-being:** A state of being comfortable, happy, and healthy.

Standards of Practice

The Standards of Practice outline the principles of professionalism, skills, and values expected from professional dog trainers and behavior consultants. The following four foundational principles form the basis of the ethical standards for all CCPDT certificants. Certificants should embody these principles and use them as a guide to interpret and apply the standards outlined in the CCPDT Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics.

The four core principles that certified dog trainers abide by are:

1. **Prioritize Well-being:** Certificants support the physical and emotional well-being of dogs, their owners, caretakers, and the broader community by implementing effective, humane, practical, and outcome-driven training strategies that are consistently informed by evolving science and real-world experience.

This means certificants:

- Assess safety and emotional well-being risks to clients, dogs, colleagues, and the community.

- Design and implement behavior change plans that are tailored to the owner's, caretaker's, and dog's abilities, needs, and temperament.
- Prioritize teaching and reinforcing alternative behaviors that replace undesired behaviors.
- Minimize behavioral intervention strategies that produce observable signs of aversiveness.
- Avoid behavioral intervention strategies that cause prolonged stress or lead to chronic anxiety from sustained fear.
- Implement measures to prevent harm and minimize stress.
- Document and communicate the training strategies and goals to ensure transparency and accountability.
- Adjust behavior change plans based on the dog's progress, feedback from the owner, and collaboration with other professionals.
- Systematically assess both immediate and long-term outcomes of behavior change plans to ensure they are effective, humane, and sustainable.
- Use measurable indicators of success, such as behavior improvement, emotional stability, and client satisfaction.
- Collaborate with clients, trainers, veterinarians, and other professionals when needed to design and implement behavior change plans.

2. Commit to Professional Growth: Certificants are committed to professional growth through continuing education and hands-on experience to enhance their knowledge, skills, and effectiveness. This includes staying informed about advancements in dog training, actively seeking out learning opportunities, and being open to feedback to enhance their competence and effectiveness.

This means certificants:

- Participate regularly in professional development activities, such as courses, seminars, and workshops focusing on dog training techniques and related disciplines, including neurobiology, ethology, and genetics.
- Stay informed about training methods and practices, identify those with scientific support, and avoid those lacking scientific support or posing potential harm.
- Educate clients about the risks and benefits associated with training strategies.
- Evaluate their knowledge and skills to ensure they practice within their professional competence.
- Seek training and resources to enhance cultural sensitivity and inclusivity when working with diverse groups.

3. Be Honest and Accountable: Certificants demonstrate honesty and integrity by consistently providing accurate information, honoring commitments, and taking responsibility for their actions. They transparently represent their qualifications and experience, communicate realistically about training outcomes, and uphold professional accountability in all interactions.

This means certificants:

- Represent their qualifications, the results of their work, and the contributions of others accurately, avoiding any deception or misrepresentation.
- Are accountable for their actions and the actions of any supervisees or trainees under their guidance.

- Stay informed about and adhere to all CCPDT's policies, positions, practices, and other relevant regulations.
- Actively model ethical behavior in interactions with colleagues, clients, and other professionals.
- Establish and enforce policies or practices that uphold integrity and professionalism within their work environment.
- Maintain records demonstrating adherence to professional standards during audits or reviews.
- Identify and manage potential conflicts of interest to avoid or minimize harm, including those that could arise from personal, financial, institutional, political, religious, or cultural factors.
- Disclose relevant relationships or biases and, when necessary, recuse themselves from situations that could compromise ethical decision-making.

4. Demonstrate Respect and Empathy: Certificants demonstrate respect and empathy toward clients, colleagues, other professionals, and the broader community by being sensitive to diverse backgrounds, experiences, and needs.

This means certificants:

- Treat everyone fairly and equitably, regardless of factors such as age, disability, ethnicity, gender expression/identity, immigration status, marital/relationship status, national origin, race, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or any other legally protected status.
- Respect the privacy and confidentiality of clients and colleagues.
- Promote and respect clients' autonomy and decision-making abilities, especially when working with vulnerable populations.
- Acknowledge the importance of personal choice in training approaches and provide clients with the necessary information to make informed service decisions.

Professional Code of Ethics

Principle I: Responsibility to Clients

- 1.1 Certificants provide professional services to clients without discrimination based on race, age, sex, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, gender, health status, religion, political beliefs, national origin, or sexual orientation.
- 1.2 Certificants comply with all applicable local, state, and national laws regarding reporting animal bites and suspected abuse or neglect, ensuring adherence to specific legal requirements within the trainer's jurisdiction.
- 1.3 Certificants respect clients' rights to make decisions regarding their dog's management, training, and care and help clients understand the potential consequences of those decisions, including engaging in transparent and professional discussions about any risks or dangers associated with potential training approaches, techniques, and applications, including any possible physical or emotional repercussions.
- 1.4 Certificants obtain written informed consent from clients before videotaping, audio recording, or permitting third-party observation.
- 1.5 Certificants obtain signed waivers, contracts, or agreements before beginning services.
- 1.6 Certificants oversee the safety and well-being of clients, animals, and the community when implementing behavior change plans.

- 1.7 Certificants implement specific protections to ensure the safety and well-being of clients and trainers when working with persons with disabilities, the elderly, and children/minors.
- 1.8 Certificants fully disclose any potential conflicts of interest to maintain transparency and trust with clients before starting services. Transparency about qualifications, limitations, and past experiences ensures clients understand the trainer's background and approach.
- 1.9 Certificants do not share confidential information that could reasonably lead to the identification of a client, prospective client, research participant, or another person with whom they have a confidential relationship unless they have obtained the prior written consent of the client or other person with whom they have a confidential relationship.
 - a. **Duty to Warn or Protect:** Confidentiality may be breached under specific circumstances, such as a likelihood of harm to oneself, the client, another trainer, or others. Examples include clients threatening harm to themselves or others, cases of child or elder abuse, or a dog that poses an imminent danger to the community.
 - b. **As Required by Law:** Certificants may disclose confidential information without the individual's consent as required by law. Examples include responding to inquiries from law enforcement, animal control, the Department of Health, or in response to a lawfully issued subpoena.
 - i. Providing necessary professional services.
 - ii. Protecting the client, trainer, or others from harm.
 - c. **Obtaining Payment for Services:** Disclosure should be limited to the minimum required to receive such payment and achieve the purpose.
 - d. **Consulting with Colleagues:** When consulting with colleagues, Certificants shall:
 - i. Avoid disclosing confidential information that could reasonably lead to identifying a client, dog, or other person or organization unless prior consent has been obtained or the disclosure is unavoidable.
 - ii. Disclose information only to the extent necessary to achieve the purposes of the consultation.
- 1.10 Certificants maintain accurate and comprehensive records of all clients, their animals, the services provided, and the outcomes for the duration of their certification period.

Principle II: Professional Competence and Integrity

- 2.1 Certificants understand and implement the Hierarchy of Behavior Change Procedures when developing behavior change plans tailored to the dog's needs, abilities, and temperament. Behavior Change Plans must address behavioral goals and support the dog's well-being and long-term success. Effective Behavior Change Plans are multi-faceted, taking into account the following factors:
 - a. **Nutrition:** Collaborate with veterinarians or nutritionists to ensure the dog receives a species-appropriate diet for its age, breed, activity level, and health conditions if there is reason to believe there could be a nutritional concern.
 - i. Certificants refer clients to a licensed veterinarian or qualified canine nutritionist for any diagnosis, treatment options, or dietary recommendations beyond their education or certification.

- b. **Health:** Consider any underlying health issues influencing the dog's behavior. When needed, refer to a licensed veterinarian to identify medical conditions contributing to undesired behaviors.
 - i. Refer the owner or caretaker to a veterinarian to rule out or identify any underlying medical conditions contributing to the undesired behavior for cases where behavior problems are complex, involve multiple factors, have a sudden onset, or lack a clear link to environmental or developmental causes.
 - ii. Refer to a veterinarian in cases where the dog shows minimal or no improvement in behavior despite consistently implementing a behavior change plan over a defined period (e.g., four to six weeks) or if the response to interventions is significantly below expected outcomes.
 - iii. Modify the behavior change plan as necessary to accommodate the dog's physical needs while continuing to work toward the established behavioral goals.
- c. **Physical Environment:** Use strategic antecedent arrangements to modify the environment, address the dog's motivations, and adjust or eliminate stimuli to prevent the rehearsal of undesired behaviors. These arrangements should support minimally restrictive environmental management strategies that promote behavior change while meeting the dog's behavioral, emotional, and biological needs, including providing appropriate exercise and enrichment opportunities.
- d. **Behavioral Interventions:** Assess the dog's interactions with people, other animals, and its environment by observing and documenting its behavior when it is safe to do so. Based on these observations, develop and implement a behavior change plan that prioritizes reinforcement-based strategies to teach and strengthen desired behaviors and improve the dog's emotional response to specific situations.

Behavior Change Plans must incorporate the following elements:

- i. Consideration of the dog's breed, age, health, home environment, past reinforcement history, community safety, and the owner or caretaker's knowledge, skills, abilities, and limitations.
 - ii. Practical, achievable, and sustainable strategies tailored to the owner or caretaker's knowledge, skills, abilities, and limitations.
 - iii. Clearly defined goals to apply reinforcement-based training strategies consistently and comprehensively to increase alternative behaviors and improve the dog's emotional response to specific situations.
 - iv. Opportunities for choice, agency, and control, including allowing dogs to engage with or opt out of training tasks, navigating situations at their own pace, and minimizing unnecessary restrictions on their behavior.
- e. **Avoid Punishment-Based Techniques:** Certificants work to minimize the use of and replace punishment-based training strategies, overly restrictive management techniques, and other aversive elements, including those that the owner or caretaker may have already employed when implementing behavior change plans.
 - i. Certificants understand that only the dog can determine what is reinforcing or aversive. This requires assessing handling, petting, food, tools, equipment, and the environment each time the dog encounters them.

- ii. Certificants must ensure that personal bias does not influence the training process or the experiences of the dog, owner, or caretaker. The effectiveness of a stimulus must be evaluated based on observable changes in behavior and emotional state. The effectiveness of a stimulus is measured by its impact on behavior and emotional state, not the certificant's intent or preference. The accurate measure of a stimulus is whether it strengthens or weakens the target behavior, regardless of the certificant's intent or personal preference.
 - iii. When applying safety and management equipment, certificant must implement a comprehensive conditioning process to ensure the dog and owner or caretaker understand how to use training equipment effectively and safely.
 - f. **Collaboration & Progression:** Certificants collaborate with a qualified professional if the dog shows minimal or no improvement in behavior despite consistently implementing a behavior change plan over a defined period (e.g., four to six weeks) or if the response to interventions is significantly below expected outcomes.
 - i. Certificants only consider implementing more restrictive or punishment-based strategies after assessing and addressing each step of the Hierarchy of Behavior Change Procedures without success or if a collaborative team determines that the potential harm from the dog's behavior outweighs the risks of the proposed intervention.
 - ii. Behavior Change Plans must prioritize reinforcement-based strategies, demonstrate a clear progression through reinforcement-based practices, and consider the dog's well-being and the client's ability to implement the plan effectively. Certificants must not escalate a behavior change plan unless it reflects a systematic, ethical approach to training and behavior modification. Escalation based solely on convenience or personal preference is prohibited.
 - iii. A plan should exist to reduce or eliminate the dog's exposure to aversive elements and the client's reliance on them over time.
 - g. **Monitoring & Adjustment:** Certificants actively observe the dog's behavior, emotional state, and interactions with its environment to assess the plan's effectiveness and identify signs of progress or areas of concern. Additionally, certificant evaluate the owner or caretaker's compliance, confidence, and ability to implement the behavior change plan as intended.
 - i. Progress should be regularly evaluated and monitored through measurable outcomes, such as increased frequency of desired behaviors, reduced signs of stress or fear, and enhanced engagement with the environment.
 - ii. Make necessary adjustments to minimize prolonged exposure to environmental factors that cause stress, fear, and discomfort or fail to meet the dog's behavioral, emotional, and biological needs.
 - 2.2 Certificants continually enhance professional competence through continued education and hands-on experience.
 - 2.3 Certificants maintain adequate knowledge of, and adhere to, all applicable ethical and professional standards.
 - 2.4 Certificants work within their professional education, certification, and individual expertise.
 - 2.5 Certificants do not permit employees, subcontractors, or supervisees to perform professional services beyond their training, level of experience, and competence based on certification and education or to hold themselves out as competent to perform such services.

- 2.6 If the Certificant has employees, subcontractors, or mentees, they hold them accountable for following the Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics when they deliver professional services on behalf of the Certificant.

Principle III: Responsibility to the Profession

- 3.1 Certificants maintain a respectful and professional demeanor when discussing colleagues' professional acts in public and private forums. This includes refraining from disrespectful or inflammatory commentary in presentations, written media, online platforms, and social media and avoiding cyberbullying or hostile behavior in electronic media.
- 3.2 Certificants maintain adequate professional liability insurance coverage, including Care, Custody, and Control coverage, where available and required by local regulations.
- 3.3 Certificants seek support from colleagues, including veterinarians and other relevant professionals, with the necessary education, experience, or certifications when confronted with complex or difficult cases, and refrain from taking cases beyond Certificant's professional education and certifications.
- 3.4 Certificants provide guidance only within the scope of their recognized professional education and credentials. For any diagnosis, treatment options, or recommendations beyond their certification—including those related to canine health and nutrition—certificants must refer clients to a licensed veterinarian or other qualified professionals.
- 3.5 Certificants provide referring veterinarians with feedback on services and behavior change plans to improve continuity of care and ensure a collaborative relationship between the veterinary health care team, training, and behavior professionals.

Principle IV: Financial Arrangements & Truthful Representation of Services

- 4.1 Certificants clearly disclose and document all financial arrangements, fees, and payment terms with clients before entering into a professional relationship, revisiting these terms if circumstances change. Pro bono or bartered services should be provided only under a specific agreement that adheres to professional standards and ethical guidelines.
- 4.2 Certificants represent facts truthfully to clients, third-party payors, and students regarding services rendered.
- 4.3 Certificants must not provide guarantees regarding the specific outcome of training and behavior plans.
- 4.4 Certificants must consider ending services when: (1) the training goals have been met, (2) the dog is not benefiting from the training, (3) the trainer is exposed to potentially harmful conditions that cannot be reasonably resolved, (4) the client requests discontinuation, (5) the client is not following the behavior change plan despite efforts to address barriers.

Principle V: Advertising

- 5.1 Certificants accurately represent their pricing, competencies, education, training, and experience relevant to their training and behavior consulting services.
- 5.2 Certificants use titles that accurately reflect their identity, responsibility, and qualifications, ensuring clarity and transparency for the public
- 5.3 Certificants correct, wherever possible, false, misleading, or inaccurate information and representations made by others concerning the certificants qualifications, services, or products.
- 5.4 Certificants represent themselves based on their specific education, training, and certifications, ensuring they offer services aligned with their expertise and qualifications.
- 5.5 Certificants refrain from making misrepresentations regarding marketing and logos for which they are no longer eligible and remove logos and certification claims when they are no longer maintained.
- 5.6 Certificants use the most current logos and follow the recommended usage of said marketing materials.

- 5.7 Certificants conduct their business with integrity, respecting intellectual property rights, upholding copyright laws, and maintaining honesty and professionalism in all communications and practices.

Principle VI: Illegal Behavior

- 6.1 Certificants must not be convicted of cruelty, abuse, or neglect of animals or humans, crimes against humanity, or violence against animals or humans during their certification period.
- 6.2 Certificants do not engage in cruelty, abuse, or neglect of animals or humans, crimes against humanity, or violence against animals or humans.
- 6.3 Certificants must not be convicted of crimes directly related to their professional certifications.
- 6.4 Certificants do not engage in gross misconduct directly related to their professional certifications.

Principle VII: Cooperation in Matters Related to Ethical Complaints

- 7.1 Certificants cooperate at all times from the inception of an ethical complaint through the completion of all proceedings regarding that complaint.
- 7.2 Certificants do not threaten or retaliate against any parties or witnesses to a good faith ethics complaint, both during the course of the complaint and after the completion of all proceedings.
- 7.3 Certificants create and maintain detailed, high-quality records of their training activities throughout the service relationship. This ensures accountability, supports the trainer's or other professionals' provision of services, and meets applicable legal, regulatory, and organizational requirements. Documentation should be maintained in a way that allows for timely communication and a smooth transition of services if needed during the certification period.