



Code of Ethics

The Code of Ethics was created to set forth guidelines for members of New Mexico Dog Trainers United (NMDTU). In order to be accepted as a member of this organization, you must agree to and comply with the following principles.

Segments of our Code of Ethics are taken in their entirety from the Joint Standards of [Practice and Professional Code of Ethics \(2025\)](#) issued by APDT International, IAABC, IAABC-F and KPA. This is to ensure our alignment with wider industry practices.

Principle I: Responsibility to Clients

- 1.1 Trainers/behavior consultants provide professional assistance to persons without discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy, sexual orientation, or gender identity), national origin, age disability and genetic information (including family medical history).
- 1.2 Trainers/behavior consultants are aware of, and comply with, applicable laws regarding the reporting of animal bites, and suspected abuse or neglect.
- 1.3 Trainers/behavior consultants respect the right of clients to make decisions regarding their pet's management, training, and care. Trainers/behavior consultants are responsible for helping clients understand the potential consequences of those decisions.
- 1.4 Trainers/behavior consultants obtain informed consent from clients before videotaping, audio recording, or permitting third-party observation.
- 1.5 Trainers/behavior consultants obtain signed waivers, contracts, or agreements prior to the start of services.
- 1.6 Trainers/behavior consultants ensure and oversee the safety of clients, animals, and the public in implementing training, and behavior programs.

Principle II: Confidentiality

- 2.1 Trainers/behavior consultants do not share confidential information that could reasonably lead to the identification of a client, or prospective client, research participant, or other person with whom they have a confidential relationship, unless they have obtained the prior written consent of the client, research participant, or other person with whom they have a confidential relationship.
- 2.2 Trainers/behavior consultants keep accurate and complete records of all clients, their animals, services provided, and the conclusion of the services provided. These records should be maintained with confidentiality and only released with written permission from the client.
- 2.3 Trainers/behavior consultants will collaborate with veterinary and other pet care professionals only after receiving client consent.

Principle III: Professional Competence and Integrity

- 3.1 **Well-Being and the Five Domains:** Behavior plans must support both immediate behavioral

goals and the animal's overall well-being and long-term success. Professionals must adhere to the Five Domains Model (Mellor et al., 2020; Littlewood et al., 2023), which lists the five components of animal welfare as nutrition, health, physical environment, behavioral interactions, and mental state.

- A. Nutrition: If the animal appears to be an unhealthy weight, or if there is other reason to suspect a nutritional concern, professionals must recommend veterinary evaluation to the animal's guardian and, with the guardian's consent, collaborate with the veterinary professional as appropriate. Professionals must remain within their scope of practice when making recommendations or offering nutritional advice.
- B. Health: Professionals must consider any underlying health issues that may influence behavior.
 - i. For all new cases, verify that the animal has had a veterinary examination within the past 12 months. If not, recommend that the caregivers schedule an appointment to rule out possible medical concerns.
 - ii. Refer to a veterinary professional if behavior concerns are severe, sudden in onset, multi-faceted, not easily explained by environmental or developmental factors, or if progress is limited despite appropriate intervention.
 - iii. Modify training plans as necessary to accommodate the animal's health status and life stage while continuing to work toward established goals.
- C. Physical Environment: Professionals must assess whether the animal's environment meets their behavioral, emotional, and biological needs. This includes, but is not limited to (Mellor et al., 2020):
 - Adequate space
 - Appropriate bedding/substrate
 - Clean air and appropriate air quality (e.g., species-appropriate humidity levels)
 - Absence of aversive or noxious sounds or scents
 - Appropriate temperature
 - Conditions conducive to adequate sleep
 - Reasonable balance of predictability and variability
 - No prolonged exposure to fear-inducing stimuli
 - i. Provide recommendations and assistance to the client to improve the environment as needed, while taking into account the client's abilities and resources.
 - ii. Behavior plans must be adjusted to minimize prolonged exposure to environmental factors that cause toxic stress, fear, or discomfort, and the professional should identify and mitigate factors that fail to meet the animal's needs.
- D. Behavioral Interactions: A critical component of all behavior and training plans is consideration of the animal's interactions with the environment, humans, and other animals (Littlewood et al., 2023). Practitioners must evaluate these interactions and,

when necessary, implement comprehensive behavior plans. For example, if an animal displays fearful or aggressive behavior during social interactions, a plan may include avoiding or minimizing distressing situations, educating caregivers to observe and respond appropriately to body language, increasing enrichment and confidence-building exercises, and implementing desensitization and counterconditioning.

- i. Practitioners must use thoughtful antecedent arrangements that meet the animal's needs, ensuring the environment is managed to prevent rehearsal of undesired behaviors and to support behavior change.
- ii. Agency is critical to well-being (Englund and Cronin, 2023; Littlewood et al., 2023; Špinka and Wemelsfelder, 2016). Therefore, behavior plans must offer the animal control, choice, and agency whenever it is safe and reasonable to do so. In all interventions, animals must be offered multiple appetitive choices, such as whether to engage in the training session, which reinforcers to use, and how to interact socially. Behavior plans must be adjusted based on the animal's feedback.
- iii. Professionals must treat each individual, regardless of species, with respect and consideration for their unique nature, preferences, abilities, and needs. This includes actively working to understand the animal's preferences. The professional's goal is to create a partnership that values the animal's comfort and well-being.

E. Mental state: Behavior plans must prioritize the animal's emotional well-being in addition to achieving behavioral goals. Professionals must consider the animal's subjective experiences, as well as objective measures of behavior, to ensure interventions are ethically sound and lead to sustainable outcomes.

3.2 Procedure Selection: Professionals shall utilize non-aversive and/or positive reinforcement-based training, and support the animal's emotional well-being and comfort. The focus should be on the learner's freedom to engage in behaviors that result in favorable outcomes for the learner.

- A. Professionals shall not use training, management, or behavior modification techniques that rely on fear, pain, distress, or harm. This includes, but is not limited to:
 - Positive-punishment-based strategies
 - Management practices that significantly restrict the animal's movement, choice, or ability to perform normal behaviors
 - Intentional deprivation of food, water, or social interaction
 - Tools or equipment designed to cause, or that functionally result in causing, fear, pain, or startle
- B. Professionals must do their best to recognize their own inherent biases when considering procedure selection and working with animals and people. The professional must aim to consider the perspective of the learner's experience (both human and animal). In addition, professionals must recognize that internal states— such as pain, fear, stress, or fatigue—may serve as antecedents that contraindicate training and require that the learner's immediate well-being take priority over any intervention.

- C. Professionals understand that only the learner can determine what is appetitive or aversive and must recognize and apply this principle for the benefit and well-being of the learner. Professionals will develop training or behavior interventions based on the animal's breed, age, health, home environment, past experiences, and the owner or caretaker's knowledge, skills, and abilities. The professional must continually assess handling, petting, interactions, food, tools, equipment, and the environment from the animal's perspective.
 - D. In addition to the approaches listed in 3.1, professionals will focus on teaching and reinforcing desired behaviors to replace undesired behavior(s), while ensuring the new behavior serves a similar function for the animal.
 - E. When applying new safety and management tools, a comprehensive conditioning process must be completed to ensure tools are not causing fear, anxiety, or pain or are otherwise aversive to the animal. This does not justify the use of tools that would otherwise not be permitted under 3.2.A. Guardians or handlers should be taught how to use training equipment safely, effectively, and in ways that protect the animal's physical and emotional well-being.
 - F. The behavior plan must minimize risk to the animal, the caretaker, and the community and shall address foreseeable risks to the animal and the public.
 - G. Professionals may work with clients who are already using aversive techniques or tools, provided they do not introduce, recommend, or implement these methods themselves. In such cases, the professional must do their best to educate and support the client in transitioning to humane, science-based alternatives that prioritize the animal's well-being. This approach is grounded in harm reduction and relationship preservation, recognizing that maintaining trust with the client increases the likelihood of lasting positive change. During the transition process, the professional must also do all they can to mitigate the negative impacts on the animal. The goal is to replace pre-existing aversive interventions with effective, non-aversive or positive-reinforcement-based strategies that ensure long-term behavioral success and well-being.
- 3.3 Trainers/behavior consultants maintain competence in training and behavior through continuing education.
 - 3.4 Trainers/behavior consultants maintain adequate knowledge of, and adhere to, applicable laws, ethics, and professional standards as set forth by their certifying organization and/or educational governing body.
 - 3.5 Trainers/behavior consultants provide truthful and transparent advertising and representation concerning their qualifications, certifications, experience, performance, and pricing of services.
 - 3.6 Trainers/behavior consultants refrain from providing guarantees regarding the specific outcome of training and behavior plans.
 - 3.7 Trainers/behavior consultants provide full disclosure of potential conflicts of interest to clients and other professionals
 - 3.8 Trainers/behavior consultants work within their professional education and individual expertise, seek help and education when confronted with complex or difficult cases, and refrain from taking cases beyond their professional experience.
 - 3.9 Trainers/behavior consultants provide referring veterinarians with professional feedback on services provided as requested, including sharing training or behavior plans, to improve

continuity of care and ensure the collaborative relationship between health and behavior professionals.

3.10 Trainers/behavior consultants do not advise on problems outside the recognized professional education and certifications, and do not provide advice or recommendations in areas of veterinary medicine or family counseling, unless licensed and qualified to do so.

3.11 Trainers/behavior consultants do not permit employees, subcontractors, or supervisees to represent themselves as competent to perform professional services beyond their training, level of experience, and competence based on certification and education.

Principle IV: Responsibility to the Profession & New Mexico Dog Trainers United

4.1 Trainers/behavior consultants are respectful of colleagues, members of NMDTU, the NMDTU organization, and other professionals and do not engage in public commentary that is disrespectful of the individual, derisive or inflammatory, including commentary in public presentations, written media or on websites, internet discussion lists or social media. This includes actively recruiting clients away from other trainers, and cyberbullying, which is the use of electronic media for deliberate, repeated and hostile behavior against colleagues.

4.2 Professional trainers/behavior consultants maintain adequate professional liability insurance coverage.

4.3 Trainers/behavior consultants shall not commit business fraud, plagiarism, copyright infringement, misuse or misappropriation of logos, trademarks, theft of intellectual property, slander, or libel.

Principle V: Financial Arrangements & Truthful Representation of Services

5.1 Prior to entering into the professional relationship, Trainers/behavior consultants clearly disclose and explain to clients all financial arrangements and fees related to professional services.

5.2 Trainers/behavior consultants represent truthfully to clients, third party payors, and students what services have been or are being rendered for fees paid.

Principle VI: Advertising

6.1 Trainers/behavior consultants accurately represent their competencies, education, training, and experience relevant to their practice of training and behavior.

6.2 Trainers/behavior consultants do not use titles that could mislead the public concerning the identity, responsibility, educational level, and status of those practicing under that title.

6.3 Trainers/behavior consultants correct, wherever possible, false, misleading, or inaccurate information, and representations made by others, concerning the consultant's qualifications, services, or products.

6.4 Trainers/behavior consultants do not represent themselves as providing specialized services unless they have the appropriate education, training, or experience.

6.5 Trainers/behavior consultants refrain from making misrepresentations regarding marketing and logos for which the practitioner is no longer eligible, and removes logos and claims of certification or NMDTU membership when no longer maintained by the practitioner.

6.6 Trainers/behavior consultants agree to use the most current logos and related marketing materials of NMDTU, and follow the organization's recommended usage of these materials.

Any member is subject to termination of membership if they: (a) are convicted of a felony that involves violence against people or animals; (b) engage in conduct which could lead to conviction of a felony, or a misdemeanor, related to their functions as a dog training professional; (c) engage in cruelty, abuse, or

neglect of animals or humans, crimes against humanity, or violence against animals or humans as interpreted by the Committee; (d) fail to adhere to the above Code of Ethics; or (e) fail to cooperate with any investigation of an ethical complaint to NMDTU from inception through the completion of all proceedings regarding that complaint.

Any member, or member applicant, who wishes to appeal the termination may do so in accordance with the complaints process.

By signing the below, you agree to adhere to the above Code of Ethics as a requirement of membership with New Mexico Dog Trainers United:

Signature

Date

Printed Name