

The Academy

FOR DOG TRAINERS

Mission and Code of Conduct

The Academy exists to provide a comprehensive, science-based curriculum on aversives-free pet dog training, behavior and behavior modification so that dogs:

- 1) are not relinquished to shelters and rescues due to behavior problems,
- 2) are integrated into families and not relegated to yards, garages or kennels,
- 3) are socialized, have high quality of life, enriched environments, and a sense of safety
- 4) are understood by their human families and allowed to engage in species-normal behavior, empowered to access reinforcers (e.g. attention, play, food, toys, smells etc.) in ways that are acceptable in a human environment,

so that dog trainers:

- 5) are trained and mentored in an ethical and evidence-based standard of care,
- 6) have long, safe, fulfilling careers,
- 7) are supported and provided a safe environment to learn, grow and flourish,

and so that dogs' families:

- 8) can enjoy the richest possible relationship with their dogs,
- 9) are empowered to manage and modify their dogs' behavior,
- 10) understand the nature and needs of their dogs.

Code of Conduct

To achieve this mission, students, staff and graduates of The Academy ("members of The Academy") adhere to the highest professional standards befitting a complex, helping profession. These include:

Aversives-Free Training Philosophy

While The Academy recognizes that it is still legal in most jurisdictions to use P+ and R- tools and techniques on dogs, there is ample evidence in both the pure and applied literature that training, dog wrangling and behavior modification can be accomplished without the use of aversive stimuli and their attendant side effects and impact on dog welfare. Students, staff and graduates of The Academy practice and endorse training, wrangling and behavior modification that does not employ pain, fear, startle, electric shock, intimidation, strangulation or other forms of P+ or R-.

Evidence-Based Practice and Intellectual Integrity

Competence at dog training, behavior modification and effective skill-building in owners relies on a thorough knowledge of the principles of operant and classical conditioning, as well as their

efficient application in pet dog settings. Furthermore, the dog owning public is best protected as consumers of dog training and behavior modification services if questions of motivation and side-effects are transparent. Competence and transparency are therefore critical to our work. Obfuscation of means of motivation that is based either on poor knowledge of animal learning or deliberate attempts to hide or re-brand techniques and tools is unacceptable practice. Misrepresenting to clients, other professionals or the public how training and behavior modification work is dishonest and unethical.

Professional Demeanor, Collegial Atmosphere, Etiquette

As an Academy student, you are in training for a complex profession that involves solving problems under pressure, teaching, counseling often distraught clients, and interacting with other professionals. We are usually called upon to be the coolest, most compassionate head in the room. We consider your conduct during your tenure as student to be both preparation for and a reflection of your future conduct as an applied behavior professional. The Academy is also protective of its culture and the strong community it has built for the benefit of you, other students, graduates and Academy staff. For these reasons, any pattern of poor conduct will result in your expulsion from Academy. Academy members, including fellow students, graduates and staff, and fellow professionals and clients are to be treated with respect, courtesy and an assumption of goodwill.

Infringements

Students who require coaching in professional conduct will have the opportunity to improve with successive approximations. All students are granted a warning with detailed feedback for a first offense, and probation with further feedback for a second, before being expelled for a third offense (this is a “three strikes” system). Warning, probation or expulsion may result from hostile or unprofessional conduct on discussion platforms, during interactions about your work, i.e. during video or assignment feedback, regarding test results, or any combination of these.

Discussion Platforms

Our jobs are performed in a virtual philosophical war zone, without standards of care, and so burnout is endemic in our profession. For this reason, our culture emphasizes mutual support, assumption of goodwill, humor and fun, and Academy discussion platforms are moderated for safety and collegiality. Students seeking a free-for-all atmosphere, where any kind of unkind or abrasive discourse is allowed, can find these elsewhere on the Internet. In Academy discussion platforms, critical thinking and healthy debate on technique and philosophy are encouraged but ad hominem attacks, combative, hostile or passive-aggressive tone directed at fellow students, grads or staff will be considered incidents of unprofessional conduct (see Infringements above).

Coaching and Evaluation of Work

Academy modules and webinars, practica, written assignments and exams are all carefully curated to produce competent applied behavior practitioners in a field that is currently unregulated and in which, historically, there has been a Wild West mentality regarding how to proceed in training dogs, and teaching and counseling clients. If you are asked to re-submit video or assignments, it is because it is in your best interest to do so. The Academy staff takes its job of developing your skills very seriously. The request to re-submit video, for these or for other reasons, is one that is entirely for student benefit. If a student responds rudely, defensively or combatively, s/he will be gently warned. If s/he does so a second time, s/he will be on probation. A third such response will result in the student being expelled. Written assignments are designed to build specific skills you will need to function as a competent applied behavior professional. As you move through the program, assignments increasingly will test

your ability to construct plans and programs, extrapolate, solve problems and make decisions in case situations. If an assignment is sent back for revision, it is because we would much rather you develop particular skills while in Academy than on actual cases. As with video re-submissions, responses that are rude, defensive or combative will result in use of one of your three strikes.

Appeals Procedure

If the student wishes to appeal an expulsion decision of The Academy for conduct reasons, a panel will be convened consisting of one Academy Staff member, one Senior Student and one Academy graduate. The Academy must present its evidence to the panel within 14 days of the appeal initiation. The student must present their statement in writing to the panel within 14 days of the appeal initiation. The panel will deliver a final decision within 14 days of receipt of both parties' (Academy and student) written material. The panel has full discretion regarding whether to reverse an expulsion, and if so, reverse strikes leading to that expulsion, or to uphold the expulsion. Panel decisions must be unanimous. In the event of a deadlocked panel, another panel will be convened. The decision of the appeals panel will be final.

Representing Membership in The Academy

Academy members are asked to understand that their work - including but not limited to advertising and promotion, client interactions and materials, social media posts and comments, blog posts, written articles and presentations - reflects on the reputation of The Academy as well as their own. Academy members are therefore asked to please consider the ethos presented in this document in their day-to-day communications and behavior. Please request permission before using The Academy logo.

Academy members are asked to use good discretion when sharing third party material in the Café, vetting content for taste and educational value, and to obey all applicable intellectual property laws.

The Academy Mission and Code of Conduct are living documents and Academy members are encouraged to offer suggestions for additions or refinements.