

## **Groups available for help with behavioral problems in pets: A guide for veterinarians**

The American College of Veterinary Behaviorists (ACVB: [www.dacvb.org](http://www.dacvb.org)) appreciates the need for qualified help when dealing with behavioral problems in pets and want to ensure that the public and the professional community has access to the most accurate information. In order to ensure this, veterinarians must know the three groups of individuals who can help.

The three groups of individuals available to help with behavioral problems are: Diplomates of the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists, Certified Applied Animal Behaviorists (CAABs) and Associate Certified Applied Animal Behaviorists (ACAABs) and dog trainers. Below is a summary of the educational requirements for each group.

**Diplomates of the American College of Veterinary Behavior (DACVB)** are veterinarians who are specialists in the field. These specialists have completed a residency or training program in the discipline of veterinary behavioral medicine. As part of this program they have studied topics including but not restricted to: sociobiology, psychology of learning, behavioral genetics, behavioral physiology, psychopharmacology, ethology, and behavioral endocrinology. Specialists in veterinary behavioral medicine have both the medical and behavioral knowledge to evaluate cases to determine if there is a medical component and to determine if the patient would benefit from medication. Additionally, specialists often determine which medication(s) would be most appropriate as part of an integrated treatment program that includes behavioral modification plans appropriate to the individual patient. Specialists in veterinary behavioral medicine have the skills and knowledge to take detailed behavioral and medical histories, weed out irrelevant information, and base the treatment plan on the pertinent behavioral and medical information. This ability to take a good history and to ascertain relevant facts is essential and is often overlooked as a necessary skill when working with behavior problems. This skill is similar to assessing the information obtained from a physical exam, blood work and other diagnostic modalities in order to diagnose and treat medical problems in an animal.

All standards and procedures of ACVB are approved by the American Board of Veterinary Specialists (ABVS) which is an organization within the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA). Professional conduct standards are set by both the AVMA and the ABVS, as are requirements for training programs. Specialists in veterinary behavioral medicine are also held accountable to local and state laws of veterinary practice.

*Members can be found at [www.dacvb.org](http://www.dacvb.org)*

**Certified Applied Animal Behaviorists (CAABs)** have earned a PhD in biological or behavioral sciences with an emphasis on animal behavior. Applied Animal Behaviorists are trained in the science of animal behavior and are very knowledgeable in subjects such as ethology, learning theory, and psychology. CAABs and ACAABs have the skills to take a detailed behavioral history and understand which details are relevant to the presenting behavior problem and which are not. In addition, they are skilled at implementing behavior modification programs appropriate to the individual animal. There are a few CAABs who are also

veterinarians who have a PhD or Masters degree or are DACVBS; however the majority of CAABS are not veterinarians at this time. Unless the CAABs or ACAAB are veterinarians, they will not have the medical background necessary to assess if or how much a medical component is contributing to the problem. Non veterinary AABs, can not make an assessment on which medication would be most efficacious nor assess which medication would be the most appropriate based on the individual animal's medical history. Only veterinarians can assess the aforementioned.

CAABs and ACAABs earn their certification from the Animal Behavior Society (ABS: [www.animalbehavior.org](http://www.animalbehavior.org)) which sets the educational, ethical, experiential, and professional criteria that must be met. Certification is awarded for 5 years and then recertification is required.

*\*Members can be found at [www.certifiedanimalbehaviorist.com](http://www.certifiedanimalbehaviorist.com)*

**Dog trainers** There are no educational requirements for dog trainers. This is why it is so difficult to identify a qualified trainer to work with dogs for basic obedience or certain problematic behaviors. Dog trainers are not governed by any one oversight organization that sets and enforces standards. Recently, groups have formed to develop requirements, standards, training, and certification to try to develop professionalism and quality control. The Certified Council for Pet Dog Trainers (CCPDT; [www.ccpdt.org](http://www.ccpdt.org) or go to [www.apdt.com](http://www.apdt.com) to get to the CPDT directory ) has created an exam-based certification process, supported by mandated continuing education, that focuses on principles of learning and their application to dog training. The International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants ( IAABC: [www.iaabc.org](http://www.iaabc.org)) has developed a credit-based educational program that can lead to certification as a pet behavior counselor. There are some groups that are focusing on a very specific form of training such as clicker training ([www.karenpryoracademy.com](http://www.karenpryoracademy.com)). Trainers should be knowledgeable about the fundamentals of learning theory and psychology, but it is not their responsibility to diagnose and work with animals that would benefit from the help of a specialist. Good trainers seek out continuing education regarding animal behavior topics, have an understanding of basic learning theory and know their limits and refer cases with serious behavior issues to a qualified individual ( DACVB, AAAB or CAAB). Last, but certainly not least, a good trainer – as is true for Diplomates of the ACVB, CAABs and ACAABs - will use the most humane techniques for training.

