

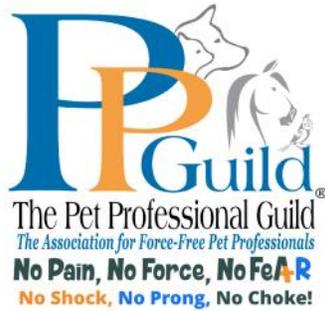
**Official Pet Professional Guild (PPG) response to the announcement (September 11, 2018) by the International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants (IAABC), the Association of Professional Dog Trainers (APDT), and the Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers (CCPDT) that they have combined to adopt a unified Code of Conduct, a Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice for professional animal behavior consultants and trainers.**

PPG wishes to acknowledge the efforts of all those who participated in the development of the combined Code of Conduct, Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice and recognizes the initial steps made jointly by those organizations.

Since its inception in 2012, PPG has been unwavering and unequivocal about where it stands on equipment philosophy and training methods for pets. This has always been to take an exclusively force-free approach and to “do no harm.” PPG’s Guiding Principles (2018) state that “to be in any way affiliated with the Pet Professional Guild, all members must adhere to a strict code of conduct. PPG members understand ‘force-free’ to mean: No shock, No pain, No choke, No fear, No physical force, and No compulsion-based methods are employed to train or care for a pet.” These are non-negotiables for all PPG members. For critics of the term and definition of “force-free,” PPG (2018) presents that “any definition can never be so expansive and explicit that every possible situation is addressed. This is seen everywhere in life and most obviously in the US legal system where very often courts cannot agree on a single interpretation of what terms and definitions mean, including physical force. Recognizing this, PPG understands, in the context of the Guiding Principles and as a general framework, physical force to mean ‘any intentional physical act against a pet that causes psychological or physical pain, harm or damage to the pet.’”

To that cause, PPG values an inclusionary approach, so it can provide affordable education and networking opportunities. This approach also includes a provisional membership option to address the need for open dialogue amongst practitioners and create a framework for future members. Further, PPG sets forth that an individual trainer’s choice of methods and equipment has a direct correlation to their skills and knowledge, meaning the more skilled the trainer, the less they will rely on aversive tools and techniques due to their professional competence in the requisite knowledge and skills. It further stands, therefore, that industry credentialing is a recognition of education, knowledge, skills and professional competence. As such, credentials should drive best practice and operational standards.

PPG encourages the use of a “humane hierarchy” approach to training and behavior change that lies strictly within the parameters of its Guiding Principles, and sits clearly on the side of a constructional approach where operant behaviors are built and problematic emotional

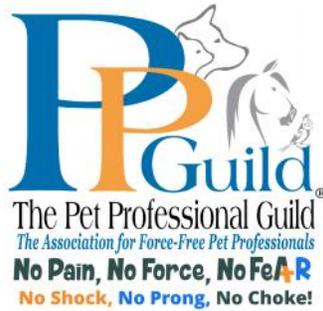


reactions are changed via humane, positive reinforcement and counterconditioning protocols, as opposed to outdated, aversive methods that rely on fear, pain and intimidation to stop behavior and have no place in the 21st century. PPG's stance is unambiguous and based on the growing body of scientific study and research that we, as professionals, have access to today. It allows for no exceptions, including "only in certain situations," "what if," or "last resort" scenarios that have the tendency simply to muddy the waters and create misunderstanding, false pretexts or misguided practice. Indeed, if so-called humane hierarchies are implemented in isolation from any non-negotiable best practices or ethical guidelines, they ultimately fail the pet, the owner, the professional, and the entire industry.

PPG (2018) believes pets have "an intrinsic right to be treated humanely, to have each of their individual needs met, and to live in safe, enriched environments free from force, pain and fear." Given that highly effective, positive, humane training alternatives are already available to pet training and behavior professionals, there is absolutely no reason for aversive methods to play any part in the current pet industry culture of accepted practices, tools or philosophies. It is PPG's view that organizations, associations and councils responsible for the representation, guidance and certification of pet industry professionals must wholly commit to eliminating methods and tools that work by causing fear and pain. These bodies play a critical role in establishing and recommending best practices, education, leadership and technical standards in their respective arena, and PPG holds that they also have the obligation to take a transparent and consistent position on important and urgent issues, including training practices and equipment use (Pet Professional Guild, 2017).

PPG's ultimate goal is to represent pets who cannot offer informed consent and for its members to take an instructional approach to teaching more acceptable behaviors. PPG considers this to be a fundamental welfare issue with no room for maneuver, regardless of an individual professional's personal goals for a pet. Thus, while PPG considers the Standards of Practice announced by IAABC, APDT and CCPDT to be a step in the right direction, it is nonetheless disappointed that these same standards call for members of the collective organizations to "minimize the use of aversive stimuli."

In 2017, PPG through an open letter, called on industry associations to take a stand, specifically on the use and application of shock. PPG's position has always been that "the use of electronic stimulation, or 'shock' or 'e-collars' to care for, manage and train/modify the behavior of pet animals is simply not necessary." In the same document, PPG posed – and responded to – the question: "Can there really still be a debate over the issue of using pain as a 'method' of animal training? Decades of peer-reviewed, scientific studies show, whether discussing dogs, humans, dolphins or elephants, that electric shock as a form of training to teach or correct a behavior is



ineffective at best, and physically and psychologically damaging at worst.” (Pet Professional Guild, 2017).

Additionally, industry associations and credentialing bodies must take full responsibility for the fact that pet owners are encouraged to purchase services from their members purely by association, and through their efforts to market said members to the general pet owning public. Unfortunately, this does not take into account the vast differences in methodology and philosophy that may exist across an organization’s membership body. In other words, there is no stated transparency in terms of the risks and benefits associated with the services provided, nor any differentiation between those members who practice a force-free training philosophy, and those who still risk physical and/or psychological harm to pets through their approach, philosophy and/or tool choice. In addition, there are no ramifications for members that misrepresent their services through the omission of information in a membership directory, or through their individual professional websites. This begs the question as to how consumers are protected in the absence of compulsory transparency across, or within the membership organization. As it stands, pet owners who are steered towards a professional organization through its marketing efforts search, at their own peril, through an assortment of trainers operating at opposite ends of the ethical and moral spectrum (Pet Professional Guild, 2017).

The bottom line is that it is entirely possible for pet industry representatives to support professional autonomy and the use of a humane hierarchy, while also taking a stand and position against the use and application of tools designed with one purpose: to inflict pain or fear. As such, PPG calls on fellow industry professionals and associations to take a firmer stance on specific equipment and approaches. PPG encourages all organizations to embrace the vast body of scientific research that details the many advantages of positive training methods, and publicly say “no” to any technique that causes pain or fear – including those administered via equipment that delivers electric shocks.

Finally then, while PPG commends the initial move made jointly by the IAABC, APDT and CCPDT, it calls for a bigger initial step to be made. Surely all professionals involved in the training, care and management of pets can agree that there is never a scenario, morally or ethically, where the implementation of electric shock can ever be justified or deemed necessary. PPG thus proposes an alternative first step: that electric shock is taken off the table once and for all. If the IAABC, APDT and CCPDT will agree on that as a foundation, other tools and methods that function by causing pain and fear can consequently be addressed.

Those of us who have the privilege and responsibility to represent pet professionals and, consequently, reach the wider audience comprised of pet owners and caretakers, are in the optimal position to make significant changes across our industry, within our representing



bodies, and for the benefit of the pets we serve, the owners we service, and the professionals we represent. The time to achieve this is now, *and* it is our duty to shape the future.

## References

Pet Professional Guild. (2017). Open Letter to Pet Industry Professionals Regarding the Use of Shock in Animal Training. Available at: <https://petprofessionalguild.com/Open-Letter-to-Pet-Industry-Representatives-Regarding-the-Use-of-Shock-in-Animal-Training>

Pet Professional Guild. (2018). Guiding Principles. Available at: <https://petprofessionalguild.com/PPGs-Guiding-Principles>

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