

MINIMUM STANDARDS AND BEST PRACTICES FOR DOG TRAINERS

F1. Introduction

F1.1 This annex applies to any individual, group or business offering services involving the training of dogs. The act of dog training is hereby defined as any systematic process or activity undertaken to modify, shape, or influence a dog's behaviour or emotional/physical responses, including teaching specific cues or skills, addressing problematic behaviours, socialising dogs, or providing behavioural consultation services. This encompasses any deliberate interaction regardless of training philosophy or methodology employed. A “dog trainer” is thereby anyone who participates in the aforementioned act of dog training and/or provides it as a service, whether it is the primary or secondary function of the individual, group or business. This includes pet boarding, pet sitting, pet day care providers, dog walkers, dog breeding establishments, pet shops and other related businesses.

F1.2 The following are minimum standards and best practices for dog training, which are supplementary to the minimum standards and best practices in Sections 3-6 of this code. All who are involved in the training of dogs must familiarise themselves with the minimum standards, as failure to meet the minimum standards may be used as evidence to support prosecution for an offence under the Animals and Birds Act. It should be noted that where there is a licensing regime, businesses must comply with the licensing conditions, in addition to the minimum standards contained in the Code of Animal Welfare (for the Pet Industry) and the Annexes.

F1.3 Trainers who have reasonable grounds to suspect that an animal under their care shows signs of abuse or neglect, or who become aware of a potential welfare breach under the Animals and Birds Act, should promptly report these concerns to NParks.

F1.4 Trainers must follow all existing laws and regulations in their activities.

F2. Training Approach

Minimum Standards

F2.1 Trainers must design and implement training programs/behaviour modification plans that are tailored to the individual dog's abilities, needs, temperament and learning style. Trainers are responsible for instructing dogs in functional behaviour training which focuses on

	helping dogs adjust to their living environments. This may include fundamental behaviours like sit, stay, come and settle. Considerations must also be made to the dog's breed, age, health, home environment, past reinforcement history and community safety, as well as owners' and caretakers' knowledge, abilities and limitations.
F2.2	Trainers must adopt the Least Intrusive, Minimally Aversive (LIMA) approach to dog training, making positive reinforcement the foundation of any behaviour modification plan, and working progressively through the Hierarchy of Behaviour Change Procedures , while continuously evaluating both short-term and long-term outcomes to confirm that interventions remain effective, humane and sustainable over time. Throughout this process, trainers must weigh the dogs' welfare alongside the client's capacity to execute the plan effectively.
F2.3	Trainers must work through each step of the Hierarchy of Behaviour Change Procedures without success before considering more aversive strategies.
F2.4	Trainers must assess both the potential harm from the dog's behaviour and the risks and benefits of any proposed intervention and only implement more aversive strategies if the benefit of the proposed intervention outweighs the potential harm. Escalation must reflect a systematic, humane approach to training and behaviour modification; escalation based solely on convenience or personal preference is prohibited.
F2.5	Behavioural management and intervention strategies and equipment used must be employed appropriately, correctly and safely, and must not involve unnecessary pain, injury, fear, intimidation or subject the dog to suffering, prolonged stress, and/or chronic anxiety from sustained fear.
F2.6	Trainers must be able to identify the underlying root causes of problematic behaviour and work to address them.
F2.7	Trainers must advise owners to seek veterinary attention to rule out potential pain, discomfort and other medical concerns as contributing factors to problematic behaviour.
F2.8	Dogs must be given the opportunity to exercise choice and autonomy, allowing them to engage in situations at a pace that suits their comfort, while avoiding unnecessary constraints on their behaviour. Trainers must respect the dog's choice to participate in or withdraw from training tasks, ideally by providing a designated rest area. Sessions must be

terminated if the trainer determines the dog is physically or emotionally unfit to continue.
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Best Practices

- (a) All trainers should have a good understanding of the full spectrum of dog training approaches to avoid biases in the selection of methods and to minimise the risk of misinforming the public.
- (b) Trainers should actively work to minimise and replace aversive strategies within their behaviour modification plans, including any which the owner/caretaker may have previously used.
- (c) Methods employed by trainers should be guided by key principles including fostering a strong bond with the dog through positive reinforcement and implementing consistent training techniques to ensure humane, effective, and sustainable training outcomes.
- (d) Behaviour modification plans should be regularly evaluated and adjusted based on the dog's progress (using measurable indicators for success), feedback from the owner, and input from other professionals.
- (e) When taking on a new case, trainers should treat each case as new and work the case up from scratch, applying the [LIMA approach](#) and starting with positive reinforcement-based strategies first, rather than assuming that more intrusive interventions are already warranted.
- (f) Trainers should evaluate the termination of services when any of the following situations apply:
 - Training objectives have been achieved;
 - The dog shows no meaningful or lasting improvement despite continued and varied efforts;
 - The trainer faces conditions which pose a risk to their safety or wellbeing that cannot be reasonably mitigated;
 - The client chooses to withdraw from the services or revokes their consent;
 - The client persistently fails to follow the behaviour modification plan, even after the trainer has made reasonable attempts to support them in overcoming challenges in this process.

F3. Training Environment

Minimum Standards

- F3.1 Trainers must ensure the safety of clients, animals, staff and the public during training sessions, and must maintain safe procedures and equipment in their professional practice. Training facilities must be secure to prevent escapes, and any identified hazard that could cause injury to dogs must be eliminated where possible or otherwise mitigated.
- F3.2 Trainers must provide clear safety instructions and guidelines to clients before, during, and after training sessions, especially when interacting with dogs with bite history or assessed to have a higher bite risk.
- F3.3 Training facilities must be maintained in a clean condition and well-ventilated.
- F3.4 Equipment for safely separating dogs during altercations must be readily accessible within group training areas, and at least one handler or trainer trained in safe dog separation techniques must be present to supervise group sessions.
- F3.5 Areas where group sessions are conducted must provide sufficient space in between each dog such that their interactions can be safely managed when necessary, and provide options for places to hide, withdraw from play, or rest.
- F3.6 The risk of a dog ingesting foreign objects must be adequately mitigated, such as regularly inspecting the damage of toys and enrichment items and removing unsafe items.
- F3.7 Group sessions must not exceed 12 dogs per trainer.
- F3.8 Before conducting group sessions where puppies are present, trainers must, as due diligence, check whether the dog has been brought to a veterinarian to be examined for parasites and infectious diseases and advise clients accordingly on any lapses, such that it does not pose a serious risk of infecting other animals.
- F3.9 If trainers observe that a dog is unwell (e.g. shows signs of kennel cough, diarrhoea, lethargy, etc.) they must not allow the dog into group classes, to prevent potential spread of disease and sickness, and must advise the client to seek veterinary attention.
- F3.10 Clean drinking water must be provided and accessible to dogs at all times during training sessions.

- F3.11 Dogs must be leashed with secure equipment at all times during training sessions in public areas, unless within a securely fenced designated training area.
- F3.12 During training, dogs must not be left unattended while tethered. When tethering is necessary, dogs must be under constant physical supervision at all times.

Best Practices

- (a) Group sessions should not exceed 8 dogs per trainer to ensure sufficient attention and expertise are provided to participants.
- (b) Trainers should conduct pre-class assessments to evaluate each dog's suitability for group training, considering factors such as reactivity levels, socialisation history, and behaviour around other dogs, and offer alternative arrangements where necessary. Dogs showing signs of severe aggression or anxiety in group settings should be offered alternative one-to-one training options in the first instance.
- (c) Dogs with a known history of biting people or dogs, or dogs displaying severe aggression during initial assessment, should not be accepted into group training classes, and should only be admitted into the facility if environmental management and safety equipment are adequate for safe care that meets the animals' needs.
- (d) Sessions for puppies or reactive dogs should not exceed more than 6 dogs per trainer to allow for adequate individual attention and safety management.
- (e) Before conducting group sessions where puppies are present, trainers should ensure that a veterinarian has checked the puppies for parasites and infectious diseases, such that they do not pose a serious risk of infecting other animals.
- (f) Regular risk assessments of training environments and activities should be conducted and documented in written form. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) should be evaluated and revised if the number of incidents while the dog was under the trainer's care within the prior 12 months exceeds any of the following thresholds:
 - More than two injuries per year requiring medical care to animals or staff;
 - More than two serious bites (level 3 or higher on the [Dunbar Bite Scale](#)) to people or animals per year requiring medical care to animals or staff;

- More than two instances of sickness requiring hospitalisation of animals per year;
 - More than two outbreaks of infectious disease (e.g., canine infectious cough, intestinal parasites).
- (g) Trainers should identify and maintain an up-to-date list of contacts and directions to duly qualified and accessible veterinary services that are easily accessible and appropriate to the individual dog's health risks and should obtain prior consent from owners in case of a medical emergency while in their care.

F4. Professional Competency and Training

Minimum Standards

- F4.1 All staff handling animals must be competent and properly trained in the areas of basic animal behaviour and handling before working independently with dogs, covering at least the following topics:
- Canine body language and stress signals;
 - Safe handling techniques and bite prevention.
- Acceptable forms of training include participation in conferences/seminars, private study/reading and being mentored.
- F4.2 Trainers must demonstrate proficiency in learning theory, including understanding and application in the areas of:
- Classical conditioning;
 - All four quadrants of operant conditioning (positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, positive punishment, and negative punishment).
- F4.3 Trainers must demonstrate understanding and proficiency in real-life applications of the [LIMA approach](#) to dog training.
- F4.4 New trainers with less than 1 year of documented dog training experience must work under supervision of a trainer with at least 1 year of documented dog training experience when handling clients' dogs and communicating with clients about training matters.
- F4.5 Trainers must complete continuing education annually in areas related to dog training, behaviour, or animal welfare, including participation in conferences/seminars, private study/reading and being mentored.

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| F4.6 | Trainers must demonstrate proficiency in the understanding and application of environmental and behavioural management strategies when dealing with behavioural issues and must ensure that appropriate management strategies are implemented in training programmes and behaviour modification plans to prevent rehearsal of undesired behaviours. |
| F4.7 | Trainers must operate within the scope of their professional qualifications. They must not provide medical diagnoses, prescribe medications, recommend veterinary prescription diets, or promote/sell services that constitute any practice of veterinary medicine unless they are a duly qualified veterinarian. When encountering cases with medical concerns that fall outside their area of expertise, including where therapeutic diets or nutritional supplements are being considered, trainers must advise clients to consult a veterinarian and refrain from providing veterinary advice. |
| F4.8 | Trainers must be able to identify any signs of illness or discomfort in the animals under their care. |

Best Practices

- (a) Trainers should ensure they stay informed about current research and developments in dog training and behaviour science, to ensure that their training methodologies and philosophies remain aligned with current scientific knowledge and consensus within the scientific community.
- (b) Trainers should complete continuing education for a minimum of 15 hours annually in areas related to dog training, behaviour, or animal welfare.
- (c) Trainers should undergo training for and maintain up-to-date basic canine first aid and have sufficient working knowledge and skills to respond to common incidences such as heat stress, superficial wounds, and choking.
- (d) Trainers should undergo risk assessment training to help them identify and manage safety risks in their training environments and activities.
- (e) Trainers should maintain records of staff training, supervision hours, and qualifications.

F5. Client Communication and Records

<i>Minimum Standards</i>

- F5.1 The following records must be accurate, up-to-date, comprehensive, and retained for a minimum period of 2 years beginning with the date on which the record was created or updated, and made available for NParks' inspection upon request:
- Essential particulars of the client, including their name, contact number and address;
 - Essential particulars of the dog, including the dog's name, sex, breed, age, colour, neuter status, microchip number (if applicable) and license number (if applicable);
 - The dog's vaccination certificate, blood test results, de-worming, internal and external parasite control, if applicable;
 - The dog's relevant medical history, diet and related requirements;
 - The dog's relevant behavioural history, including specific triggers, preferred motivators, unusual behaviours, and any incidents of aggressive behaviour, escape, injury/near-injury or sickness;
 - Training log for each session specifying methods, outcomes and communications with the client; and
 - Pictures and/or videos capturing the state of the dog before training.
- For records in electronic form, the electronic records must be backed up.
- F5.2 Trainers must have written SOPs, including but not limited to:
- Safe management of animals to reduce risk of injury to animals and humans;
 - The trainer's response plans to incidents of animal injury/fights/sickness/escapes; and
 - The trainer's emergency response plans.
- F5.3 Trainers must obtain informed consent for the methods and tools used in training and ensure that clients fully understand them, their potential side effects, and the potential risks and consequences of their decisions regarding their pets' management, training and care.
- F5.4 Trainers must contact clients as soon as possible to inform of any incidents of aggressive behaviour, escape, injury/near-injury, sickness or death, and promptly seek veterinary attention as necessary.
- F5.5 Before providing services, trainers must, as part of due diligence, check whether all dogs taken into their care are vaccinated, microchipped and licensed in accordance with applicable laws and regulations and advise clients accordingly on any lapses.

Best Practices

- (a) Trainers should communicate clearly with clients by explaining and demonstrating training methods in plain language, in a manner that is easy for the client to understand.
- (b) Trainers and clients should agree on goals that are humane and realistic with consideration of the dog's baseline behaviour.
- (c) Trainers should regularly update the clients on the training progress through training logs and videos.
- (d) Trainers should create and/or direct clients to written resources, to help with continuity and consistency of training.
- (e) Trainers should obtain informed and written consent for the methods and tools used in training and ensure that clients fully understand them, their potential side effects, and the potential risks and consequences of their decisions regarding their pets' management, training and care.
- (f) Trainers should provide owners with relevant training and behavioural records, or a report, upon request.

F6. Referral Procedures

Minimum Standards

- F6.1 Trainers must provide relevant training and behavioural records to other professionals (such as veterinarians and other trainers) upon request and with the owner's consent, for the purpose of referrals, to support continuity of care and to uphold a commitment to collaboration between all professionals involved. This must be done free-of-charge.
- F6.2 Trainers must collaborate with past trainers wherever possible to understand the dog's history and build the case with as much context as possible.
- F6.3 Trainers who are approached to share history must cooperate openly and transparently, with the aim of helping the dog through its current trainer.

Best Practices

- (a) When faced with challenging or complex cases, trainers should actively pursue further guidance and professional development, and/or give every

reasonable assistance towards obtaining the relevant services which they judge to be outside their personal competence.

F7. Transportation

Minimum Standards

- F7.1 All local laws and regulations relevant to transporting dogs must be strictly adhered to. Please refer to the relevant section in this Code for the other minimum standards and best practices applicable to transportation of animals.

F8. Boarding

Minimum Standards

- F8.1 A valid AVS licence is required to conduct commercial pet boarding activities, including board-and-train activities. Licensees must comply with the licensing conditions for pet boarding, which can be accessed via the [AVS website](#).

Best Practices

- (a) For boarding facilities that carry out board-and-train activities, training and housing areas should be visually monitored and recorded, such as through a closed-circuit television (CCTV) system. The surveillance should clearly capture areas where training activities take place and where animals are held. Surveillance footage should be retained and made available to NParks for inspection upon request.

Please also refer to Sections 3-6 of this code and Annexes A, B, C, D and E for the other minimum standards and best practices applicable to the pet industry. Where there are licensing conditions that overlap with minimum standards and best practices, they will supersede the minimum standards and best practices.