

APDT

Position statement on LIMA *What Do You Want the Animal TO Do?*

The Association of Professional Dog Trainers (APDT) supports a Least Intrusive, Minimally Aversive (LIMA) approach to behavior modification and training.

What Is LIMA?

LIMA requires that trainers and behavior consultants use the “least intrusive, minimally aversive technique likely to succeed in achieving a training [or behavior change] objective with minimal risk of producing adverse side effects.” It is also a competence criterion, requiring that trainers and behavior consultants be adequately trained and skilled in order to ensure that the least intrusive and aversive procedure is in fact used. ¹

LIMA Is Competence-Based

LIMA requires that trainers/behavior consultants work to increase the use of positive reinforcement and lessen the use of punishment in work with companion animals and the humans who care for them. LIMA protocols are designed to be maximally humane to learners of all species. In order to ensure best practices, consultants/trainers should pursue and maintain competence in animal behavior consulting through education, training, or supervised experience, and should not advise on problems outside the recognized boundaries of their competencies and experience. ²

Positive Reinforcement and Understanding the Learner

Positive reinforcement should be the first line of teaching, training and behavior change program considered, and should be applied consistently. Positive reinforcement is associated with the lowest incidence of aggression, attention seeking, and avoidance/fear in learners³.

Only the learner determines what is reinforcing. It is crucial that the consultant/trainer understands and has the ability to appropriately apply this principle. This may mean that handling, petting, various tools and environments are assessed by the handler each time the learner experiences them, and that trainer bias not determine the learner’s experience. The measure of each stimulus is whether the learner’s target behavior is strengthening or weakening, and not the consultant/trainer’s intent or preference.

Clarity and Consistency in Problem Solving

It is the handler’s responsibility to make training and modification of behavior clear, consistent and possible for the learner. We recognize that a variation of learning and behavior change strategies may come into play during a learning/teaching relationship, and can be humane and a least intrusive, effective choice in application. ⁴ However, ethical use of this variation is always dependent on the consultant/trainer’s ability to adequately problem solve, to understand his or her actions on the learner, and requires sensitivity toward the learner’s experience.

Preventing Abuse

We seek to prevent the abuses and potential repercussions of unnecessary, inappropriate, poorly applied or inhumane uses of punishment. The potential effects of punishment can include aggression or counter-aggression; suppressed behavior (preventing the consultant/trainer from adequately reading the animal); increased anxiety and fear; physical harm; a negative association with the owner or handlers; and increased unwanted behavior, or new unwanted behaviors.⁵

Choice and Control for the Learner

LIMA guidelines require that consultants always offer the learner as much control and choice as possible during the learning process, and treat each individual of any species with respect and awareness of the learner's individual nature and needs.⁶

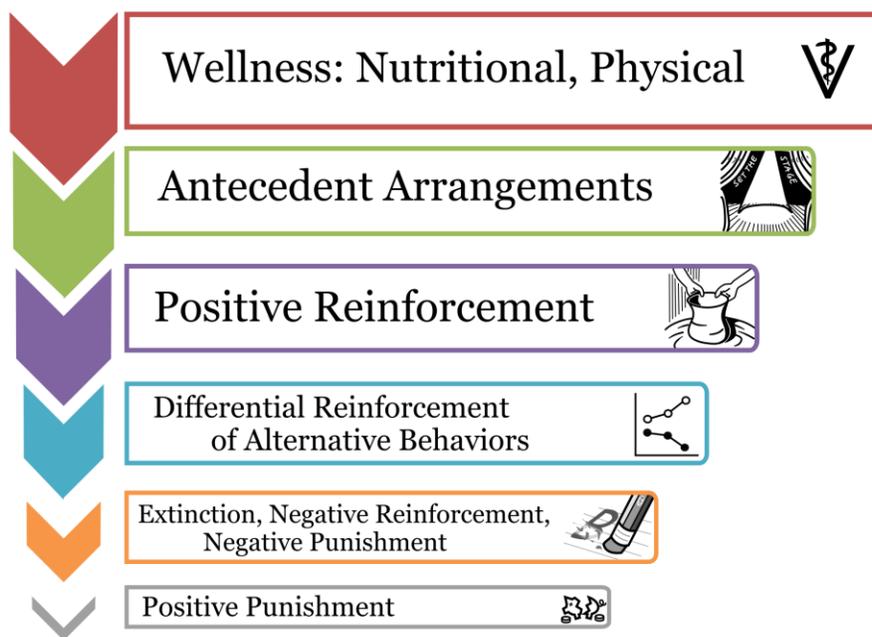
What Do You Want the Animal TO do?

We focus on reinforcing desired behaviors, and always ask the question, "What do you want the animal TO do?" when working through a training or behavior problem. Relying on punishment in training does not answer this question, and therefore offers no acceptable behavior for the animal to learn in place of the unwanted behavior.

Punishment should never be the first line of treatment in an intervention, nor should it make up the majority of a behavior modification program. Further, it should be discontinued as quickly as possible once the desired behavior change has taken place. In cases where the application of punishment is considered, best practices of application and next steps can best be determined by understanding and following the *Humane Hierarchy of Behavior Change – Procedures for Humane and Effective Practices*, outlined in the diagram attached.

For these reasons, we strongly support the humane and thoughtful application of LIMA protocols, and applaud those working with animals and humans in a humane and thoughtful manner.

Suggested Hierarchy of Behavior Change Procedures
from Least to Most Intrusive*



*Intrusiveness refers to the degree to which the learner has counter control. The goal is to use the procedure that is the least intrusive, effective alternative. In the course of an experienced behavior consultant's practice, there may be situations in which a relatively more intrusive procedure is necessary for effective outcomes. In this case, a procedure that reduces the learner's control may be the least intrusive, effective alternative. Wellness is at the top of the hierarchy to ensure that a learning solution is not implemented for behavior problems due to pain or illness. The hierarchy is a cautionary tool to reduce both dogmatic rule following and practice by familiarity or convenience. It offers an ethical checkpoint for consultants to carefully consider the process by which effective outcomes can be most humanely achieved on a case-by-case basis. Rationale like, "It worked with the last case!" is not enough. The evaluation and behavior change program of every animal should be a study of the individual (i.e., individual animal, setting, caregiver, etc.). Changing behavior is best understood as a study of one

 Friedman & Fritzler, 2014

¹ Steven Lindsay, Handbook of Applied Dog Behavior and Training Vol 3 pgs. 29 & 726.

² Per the IAABC Code of Ethics Principle III at iaabc.org/ethics and APDT Code of Conduct

³ "[The] use of positive reinforcement alone was associated with the lowest mean scores (attention-seeking score 0.33; fear (avoidance) score 0.18; aggression score 0.1). The highest mean attention-seeking score (0.49) was found in dogs whose owners used a combination of positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement. The highest mean avoidance score (0.31) was found in dogs whose owners used a combination of all categories of training method. Owners using a combination of positive reinforcement and positive punishment had dogs with the highest mean aggression score (0.27)." Emily J. Blackwell, Caroline Twells, Anne Seawright, Rachel A. Casey, The relationship between training methods and the occurrence of behavior problems, as reported by owners, in a population of domestic dogs, Journal of Veterinary Behavior: Clinical Applications and Research, Volume 3, Issue 5, September-October 2008, Pages 207-217, ISSN 1558-7878, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jveb.2007.10.008>.

- 4 • Negative reinforcement (R-) - handler removes an aversive (unwanted) stimulus to increase the frequency of behavior.
- Negative punishment (P-) - Handler removes a desired stimulus to reduce the frequency of behavior
- Positive reinforcement (R+) - Handler adds a desired stimulus to increase the frequency of behavior.
- Positive punishment (P+) - Handler adds an unwanted or aversive stimulus to reduce the frequency of behavior.

⁵ See avsabonline.org • Hutchinson RR. 1977. By-products of aversive control. In: Honig WK, Staddon JER, eds. Handbook of Operant Behavior. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall: 415-431. • Azrin NH. 1960. Effects of punishment intensity during variable-interval reinforcement. J Exp Anal Behav 3: 123-142. • Azrin NH, Holz WC, Hake DR. 1963. Fixed-ratio punishment. J Exp Anal Behav 6: 141-148. • Pauli AM, Bentley E, Diehl AK, Miller PE. 2006. Effects of the application of neck pressure by a collar or harness on intraocular pressure in dogs. J Am Anim Hosp Assoc 42(3): 207-211. • Drobatz KJ, Saunders HM, Pugh CR, Hendricks JC. 1995. Noncardiogenic pulmonary edema in dogs and cats: 26 cases (1987-1993). J Am Vet Med Assoc 206: 1732-1736. • Azrin NH, Rubin HB, Hutchinson RR. 1968. Biting attack by rats in response to aversive shock. J Exp Anal Behav 11: 633-639.

⁶ Brambell's Five Freedoms, used as animal and human welfare guidelines:

- Freedom from hunger or thirst by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigor
- Freedom from discomfort by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area
- Freedom from pain, injury or disease by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment
- Freedom to express (most) normal behavior by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind
- Freedom from fear and distress by ensuring conditions and treatment that avoids mental suffering