



ACT Companion Dog Club

Training Ethos

[Adopted 29/09/2020]

The Club's training programs – regardless of the activity being taught – are undertaken using rewards-based, force-free training methods which are consistent with contemporary developments in behavioural science and learning theory.

As well, it is now understood that dogs are emotive and sentient beings deserving of training that is sensitive to their needs, respects their personality and builds confidence and optimism.

Our Vision¹

To enhance the lives of all dogs by building and strengthening the bond between a dog and its human companions

Our Mission²

To promote responsible dog ownership and the general welfare of dogs in the Canberra Region through training

Our Training Principles

In achieving the Club's vision and mission, our training philosophy and practice takes a holistic view of the dog and its individual needs.

1. Do no harm

- The welfare of each dog is our priority. Where a member's training goals are in conflict with – or compromise – the dog's welfare, the Club and its instructors will always advocate for the welfare of the dog.
- We do not condone any treatment that is physically or mentally cruel or abusive.
- Our approach considers and optimises the physical, emotional and environmental well-being of each dog.
- We aspire to treat each dog with respect and awareness of its individual nature, preferences, abilities and needs.

2. A force-free approach

- We use rewards-based, force-free training methods and equipment.

¹ From ACT Companion Dog Club *Strategic Management Plan 2018-2021*

² From ACT Companion Dog Club *Strategic Management Plan 2018-2021*

- We do not use pain, fear, physical force, physical moulding (or manipulation), verbal intimidation or compulsion in training classes or in the treatment of dogs on the grounds at any time.
- As the Club's ambassadors our instructors will always advocate the use of rewards-based force-free training methods and equipment.
- We focus on helping Club members to positively reinforce desired behaviours and to always encourage members to consider what they want their dog to do (not what they want it to stop doing) as this will help them to identify what to train and reinforce.
- Where our instructors are qualified³ to advise individual members on abnormal behaviour, we adopt the least intrusive and most effective management strategies, modification programs and training protocols necessary to change the problematic behaviour. These protocols are consistent with the approaches set out in the *Humane Hierarchy* supported by the International Association of Animal Behaviour Consultants.⁴

Our Training Practices

1. Training Classes

- Dogs in a class will have a wide range of temperaments and behavioural challenges. The Club recognises that not all dogs are suited to a class environment and decisions regarding a dog's participation in a group class will be based on the best interest of the dog's well-being. Where a dog is deemed unsuitable for group classes, alternative options for support – consistent with the Club's rewards-based, force-free ethos – will be provided to the handler.
- The number of dogs in a class will be determined by the skill level of the handler and dog teams, and the experience of the instructor.
- Class numbers for handler and dog teams new to an activity will be limited to up to 8 teams per instructor for Behaviour Training classes and up to 10 teams per instructor for other activities.

2. Training Programs

Training programs delivered by the Club – regardless of the activity or exercises being taught – are inclusive of the following ideals that encourage awareness of humane science-based training techniques and why they should be employed.

- Encourage responsible pet ownership – the dog's basic needs for physical exercise, mental stimulation and cooperative care must be met.
- Demonstrate an understanding of how dogs learn – through associations, antecedents and consequences.
- Demonstrate an understanding of dog body language – reading and listening to a dog's body language.
- Serve to strengthen the relationship between handler and dog – empathy and kindness in training a dog.
- Provide appropriate socialisation opportunities – building confident and resilient dogs.

³ Instructors that have completed a Cert IV in Companion Animal Services or equivalent.

⁴ The overwhelming majority of behaviour problems can be prevented or resolved with one or more strategies represented in Levels 1 – 4 of the *Humane Hierarchy* (ie arranging distant and immediate antecedents, positive reinforcement and differential reinforcement of alternative behaviours). For further information on the *Humane Hierarchy* see <https://m.iaabc.org/about/lima/hierarchy/>. For a more extensive development of the Humane Hierarchy see James O'Heare's *The least intrusive effective behavior intervention (LIEBI) algorithm and levels of intrusiveness table: a proposed best practices model. Version 5.0*

at https://www.oebdh.at/images/stories/Rechtliches/Liebi_Methode.pdf and James O'Heare's *Minimally Aversive Contingency Management Planning Policy* (2016), see <https://www.associationofanimalbehaviorprofessionals.com/journal>

3. Training Equipment

There is a wide variety of equipment and tools available to train dogs. The safety of the dog and handler is paramount. Equipment accepted at the Club aligns with its principles of no fear, no force and no pain. The use of equipment that is designed to apply constriction, pressure, pain or force around a dog's neck are not allowed to be used in classes or on the grounds.

Acceptable equipment

The following equipment is considered acceptable if it is used as designed and intended, and not used in a manner that will cause psychological or physical pain or harm to the dog.

- A standard (fixed, snap-on or buckle) collar or martingale (ie limited slip or half-slip) collar appropriate to the size and strength of the dog and adjusted correctly. Note: Martingale collars must be fitted correctly so that they sit snugly around the dog's neck without any constriction when tension is applied.
- A fabric or leather lead of a gauge appropriate to the size and strength of the dog – with a single or double clip.

The following equipment is acceptable for use in Behaviour Training classes but may not be permitted in dog sport training classes.

- A front-connecting harness or a double-attach (front and back-connecting) harness – preferably used in conjunction with a double-ended lead.
- Back-attach harness designed for walking (especially good for young puppies and brachycephalic – flat-faced snub nosed – breeds, and also used for Tracking).
- Head halters can be used subject to discussion with a Club instructor. Many dogs find this type of equipment uncomfortable and it can adversely affect their behaviour.⁵
- Basket-style muzzles designed to prevent bites while allowing a dog to pant, eat and drink may be used as a safety measure to enable particular dogs with a bite history to participate in group classes.⁶

Unacceptable Equipment

The following equipment is not considered acceptable for use in training classes or on the Club grounds as they are not consistent with the Club's training principles.

- Shock or electronic collars
- Prong or pinch collars
- Choke (or 'check') chains
- Unlimited slip collars or combined unlimited slip collars and leads regardless of the material they are made from (eg fabric, leather) with the exception of all-in-one slip fabric collars and leads used in Agility classes to enable the handler to quickly apply/remove the equipment on their dog between course runs.⁷ In these circumstances the equipment must never be used in a manner that applies force or constriction to the dog's neck.
- 'Pet correction' devices used to 'startle' or 'interrupt' unwanted behaviour such as throw chains, rattle bottles, citronella collars, spray bottles, 'no bark' muzzles and air horns.

⁵ It is important to condition a positive emotional response to a halter when first introducing it to a dog.

⁶ It is important to condition a positive emotional response to a muzzle when first introducing it to a dog.

⁷ It is noted that the Australian National Kennel Council's *Rules for the conduct of Obedience Trials* allows competitors to use 'slip collars' on their dogs during sanctioned trials. These events are conducted under the auspices of Dogs ACT and the ANKC's *Rules* take precedence at these times.

The following equipment is NOT acceptable in Behaviour Training classes or on the grounds during Behaviour Training sessions because of safety issues.

- Retractable (or 'flexi') leads and bungee-style (stretchy or elasticised) leads.

The following equipment is NOT acceptable in Behaviour Training classes because of safety issues.

- Car harnesses designed to restrict the movement of a dog while in a car (unless the harness is also designed for walking purposes).

Further information

Pet Professional Guild Australia:

- Position Statement on The Use of Shock In Animal Training – see <https://www.ppgaaustralia.net.au/shockcollars>
- Position Statement on the Use of Choke and Prong Collars – see <https://www.ppgaaustralia.net.au/chokeandprongcollarpositionstatement>
- Position Statement on the Use of Pet Correction Devices – see <https://www.ppgaaustralia.net.au/Statement-on-the-Use-of-Pet-Correction-Devices>

Australian Veterinary Association:

- Statement of Principles – see <https://www.ava.com.au/policy-advocacy/policies>
- Reward-Based Training – A Guide for Dog Trainers – see <https://www.ava.com.au/siteassets/policy-and-advocacy/policies/animal-welfare-principles-and-philosophy/reward-based-training-brochure-web.pdf>

International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants

- Position Statement on Regulation in Animal Training and Behavior – see <https://m.iaabc.org/about/position-statements/regulation/>
 - IAABC Statement on LIMA – see <https://m.iaabc.org/about/lima/>
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