

IAABC Core Competencies



The IAABC recommends animal behavior consultants be skilled in seven Core Areas of Competency:

- I. Assessment Skills
- II. General Knowledge and Application of Learning Science
- III. Species-Specific Knowledge
- IV. Consulting Skills
- V. General Knowledge of Animal Behavior
- VI. Biological Sciences as Related to Animal Behavior
- VII. Ethics

Core competency is defined as “a skill needed in order to be successful at a job or other activity.”^[1] Success as an animal behavior consultant depends on the ability of the consultant to accurately assess the function of an animal’s behavior, and implement effective behavior modification strategies in agreement with a Least-Intrusive, Minimally Aversive approach. Animal behavior consultants also should maintain a working knowledge of biology as it relates to animal behavior, an understanding of consulting and behavior change program management, and ethics as it relates to both animal behavior and human learning.

I) ASSESSMENT SKILLS

A. History taking skills and history assessment

1. Eliciting accurate information
2. Interpretation of information provided
3. Assessing owner interpretation of behavioral issues

B. Behavioral observation skills

1. Accurate observation and interpretation of behaviors demonstrated by the animal
2. Ability to integrate information obtained by direct observation of the animal and the humans involved

C. Apply and integrate any additional behavioral, historical, medical and physiologic information.

1. Critically evaluate the quality of this information.
2. Act appropriately to remedy any areas of concern

II) GENERAL KNOWLEDGE AND APPLICATION OF LEARNING SCIENCE

A. Learning Science

1. Operant conditioning
2. Classical conditioning
3. Desensitization
4. Counterconditioning
5. Observational learning
6. Habituation
7. Sensitization
8. Latent learning
9. Flooding
10. Extinction
11. Stimulus Control

B. Application and awareness of differences, effectiveness and possible deleterious effects of behavior modification and training techniques such as:

- Lure/reward
- Shaping
- Marker training
- Compulsion
- Desensitization
- Counterconditioning

C. Evaluation of scientific information and data analysis

- Ability to apply scientific data to behavior modification plans
- Ability to collect and utilize related data to monitor progress and improve outcome
- Ability to apply fundamental concepts of applied behavior analysis in developing and implementing a behavior modification / training plans.

D. Intervention Strategies

- Management and safety interventions
- Behavior modification strategies
- Knowledge and appropriate use of training equipment

- Ability to apply scientific data and learning theory principles to treatment strategies

III) SPECIES-SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE

- Exercise and housing requirements
- Nutrition and diet fundamentals for the species
- Common health issues
- Species- and breed-specific anatomy, behavior, nutritional requirements
- Developmental stages
- Basic neuroscience and endocrinology as they relate to behavior
- Communication behaviors
- Interpretation of body language
- Environmental enrichment
- Behavior issues:
 - Separation-related
 - Aggression
 - Social signaling problems
 - Sexual/reproductive
 - Maternal
 - Fears and phobias
 - General anxiety disorders
 - Repetitive behaviors
 - Cognitive dysfunction
 - Elimination disorders
 - Destructive behavior
 - Self-injury
 - Excessive vocalization
 - Ingestive disorders
 - Impulsivity/unruliness

IV) CONSULTING SKILLS

- A. Awareness and evaluation of environment, and awareness of effect on animal and human client behavior
- B. Ability to assess human interactions with, and emotional sensitivities about the animal without judgement.
- C. Ability to assess how these impact the animal's behavior
- D. Ability to assess family's goals
- E. Observation and interpretation understanding of human behaviors

- F. Awareness and ability to adapt to human learning needs and styles
- G. Ability to develop solutions that function for all members of the animal's community.
- H. Ability to assist family members in resolution of conflict to arrive at a common goal"
- I. Awareness of ancillary support services
 - 1. Veterinarian
 - 2. Veterinary Behaviorist
 - 3. Supplementary Practitioners
 - 4. Veterinary Nutritionist
 - 5. Family Therapist
- J. Critically evaluate issues concerning complementary and alternative approaches or products
- K. Understand important principles in cognitive psychology, including education, learning styles, perception and attention.

V) GENERAL KNOWLEDGE OF ANIMAL BEHAVIOR

- A. Ethology
- B. Communication behaviors
- C. Genetics
- D. The key ethological, psychological and physiological concepts that underpin animal welfare.

VI) BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES AS RELATED TO ANIMAL BEHAVIOR CONSULTING

- A. Basic gross anatomy and organ systems
- B. Basic neuroanatomy and neurobiology (as relates to behavioral assessments)
- C. The functional anatomy and physiology of the vertebrate nervous and endocrine systems and their role in mediating behavior.
- D. The concept of neural plasticity, and how a learner's genetic makeup and environment can affect their brain's ability to learn.
- E. Psychopharmacology and the mode of action of the major classes of drugs used in clinical animal behavior.

VII) ETHICS

- A. Understand the key ethical and legal issues and responsibilities related to working with human clients and their animals.
- B. Understand and abide by the Code of Ethics laid out in the Joint Standards of Practice; keep up to date with any updates and changes to these.
- C. Understand the process of filing ethics complaints and the scope of sanctions that certifying organizations can use.

^[1] Dictionary.com, © Random House, Inc. 2019, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/core-competency>