

The Difference Between a Dog Trainer and a Behavior Consultant

Finding the right person to help you with a dog training or behavior issue can be complicated. The ideal candidate should be educated in the field have experience and good people skills, because after all they will mainly be working with the dog owner. The field of dog training and behavior is a science, but still very much unregulated with no licensing requirements or regulatory oversight. Working with a qualified professional can mean the difference between the dog staying in the home or being re-homed or possibly even euthanized. Here are some main differences to be mindful of.

Training session (may or may not include write up or handouts)

Dog training has to do with teaching good manners, obedience and having a fun time with your dog. It can also include some lighter behavior issues where lack of management has developed of some annoying behaviors. Training sessions can focus on rewarding desirable behaviors to improve good manners in combination with management. Examples:

- Regular obedience and fun classes such as agility, flyball, rally, nosework, etc.
- Dogs needing extra help with housetraining, play biting, destructive chewing
- Dogs needing extra help with polite greeting, leash manners and recall
- Bad habits like counter surfing and stealing objects such as shoes or tissue paper
- Socialization and learning to stay calm in the presence of distractions

Educational level: The best option is to find a certified trainer through the Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers (CCPDT), a nationally certifying body (www.ccpdt.org). Other qualified trainers may be certified through the Karen Pryor or Pat Miller Academies, or the Pet Professional Guild. Certification demonstrates knowledge, dedication and professionalism.

Behavior consult (includes a written summary with exercises and management protocols)

Dog behavior consulting usually involves counter-conditioning and desensitization strategies, confidence building and empowerment protocols. It may include getting the dog used to wearing a muzzle and/or being put on medication by the supervision of a veterinarian, or a vet behaviorist for tougher cases. Examples:

- Generalized anxiety or a strong fear response to for ex. people, sounds or novel visuals
- Separation anxiety or isolation distress
- Obsessive compulsive behaviors
- Resource guarding
- Any forms of aggression
- Startle and handling issues that can trigger a bite

Educational level: The educational level goes beyond a regular obedience trainer. Find a certified behavior consultant who has the national CCPDT certification CBCC-KA. Other organizations who certify dog behavior consultants are the International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants (www.iaabc.org), and the Pet Professional Guild (www.ppg.org). Another good third option is to choose a consultant who has an advanced university degree in a related field.

Note: The behavior consultant should be well versed in learning theory and behavior science and not rely on punishment. See <https://avsab.org/resources/position-statements/> for more information.