



INTERMOUNTAIN THERAPY ANIMALS

PETS HELPING PEOPLE

## **TEACHING & TRAINING PHILOSOPHY & SUPPORT STATEMENTS**

*May 2015*

### **ITA Mission Statement**

To enhance quality of life through the human-animal bond.

### **Teaching & Training Objective**

To promote healthy relationships between all species through humane education and training.

### **Education, Teaching & Training Position**

We choose force-free, non-aversive handling, and positive reinforcement teaching methods and training techniques because they:

- 1 best represent the relationship between handler and animal that we wish to promote—a relationship of trust, mutuality and respect. Their use not only implies the existence of these qualities in the relationship between handler and animal, it simultaneously creates and strengthens them.
- 2 are compassionate. Compassion is the foundation of our work.
- 3 are ethical. Ethics is paramount to our work.
- 4 are effective. The most up-to-date and sophisticated science supports their use by teachers, trainers, and handlers, whether novice or professional.
- 5 side-step the short- and long-term negative consequences of using punishment in teaching, training and handling.

### **Definition of Terms**

Force-free, non-aversive teaching, training and handling:

- Force-free does not force, threaten, or intimidate. It does not employ fear or pain to achieve specific behavior. It does not shock, choke, or jerk. It does not use physical molding or apply other forms of pressure—verbal, spatial or psychological—to compel compliance or obedience from another being.
- Non-aversive is the absence of the use of coercion in teaching, training and handling.
- Force-free and non-aversive teaching, training and handling eschew conventional domination-based leadership models.

Positive reinforcement methods and techniques:

- Positive reinforcement is a scientific term used in Learning Theory (Applied Behavior

Analysis). It is one of four quadrants of operant conditioning, the mechanism by which all of us acquire learned behavior. Teaching and training based on positive reinforcement is the arrangement of behaviors and rewards: the teacher pairs a behavior she finds desirable with a reward the student finds desirable.

- Positive reinforcement methods and techniques gain willing cooperation in performing desirable behavior.
- Positive reinforcement helps us know what to do rather than what *not* to do.

## Standards of Treatment

- We are advocates for the thoughtful, careful treatment of all animals, including humans.
- We recognize the vulnerability of the animal in any human-animal relationship.
- We use, and promote the use of, compassionate and humane, science-based teaching methods and training techniques.
- We do not condone physically or mentally cruel treatment of any animal for any reason.
- We attempt to dissuade anyone associated with ITA or The Family Dog (TFD) from using harsh techniques with an animal.
- We are committed to civil, non-aggressive communication, and therefore limit discussion to practices and consequences (rather than the individuals using them).
- We recognize the legal right of the human to make decisions about the handling of their animal. Rather than attempt to manage a relationship with someone who insists on using harsh techniques, we will release them from their commitment to ITA and TFD, and ask them not to return.

## Expectations of ITA Volunteers

In language and action, we expect our ITA volunteers to demonstrate the greatest respect for their animal partners.

- Because “education” and “teaching” connote subjectivity and participation on the part of the student, we prefer these terms to the term, “training.” (Though we acknowledge that “training” is the commonly-used term.)
- We ask our animals to perform behaviors rather than order them to do so, and so we prefer the word “cues” to “commands.” Further, handlers use a conversational tone of voice. Verbal cues are happy, “up” and inviting. Visual cues are small and discreet.
- The unique quality and sheer quantity of contributions made by animals in therapy work leads us to regard our animals as our “partners” rather than our “pets” or “possessions.”
- Because we respect our partners as full members of our therapy teams, we refer to them as subjects rather than objects: “she” or “he,” “who” or “whom,” rather than an “it,” “which,” or “that.”
- Therapy work is performed together, in partnership; therefore we “facilitate” and “guide,” “assist” and “help” our partners; we do not “use” them.
- Handlers listen to their animals’ responses to cues and other communications, relying on body language and use of space as indicators of the animal’s emotional state. Handlers are mindful of time limits, give their animals regular breaks preventatively, and take action at an animal’s subtlest sign of stress.

## Teaching Equipment & Behavior

### ***Acceptable Equipment for Teaching***

- Regular—nylon or leather, flat or rolled—collar and leash
- Martingale or Limited Slip collar
- Body harness
- Head halter
- Clicker
- Treat bag and treats
- Body wraps (e.g., Thundershirt®, Anxiety Wrap®, etc.)

### ***Unacceptable Equipment for Teaching***

- Prong collar
- Choke collar
- Shock collar
- Limited Slip collar with metal links

### ***Acceptable Equipment for Visiting***

- Regular—nylon or leather, flat or rolled—collar and leash
- Martingale or Limited Slip collar
- Body harness
- Therapy vest
- Treats

### ***Unacceptable Equipment for Visiting***

- Prong collar
- Choke collar
- Shock collar
- Limited Slip collar with metal links
- Head halter
- Body wrap

### ***Unacceptable Handler Behavior for Teaching and Visiting***

- Leash-jerking
- Pushing or pulling into position
- Forcing compliance
- Use of spray bottle
- Finger-snapping

### ***We discourage the following:***

- Using the collar, leash or harness to steer a dog into position
- Using a loud, commanding voice

## Sources

- Pet Professional Guild Guiding Principles, Vision, Mission, Pledge, Ethics, Key Values, and Key Charter, [petprofessionalguild.com](http://petprofessionalguild.com)
- American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior (AVSAB) Mission Statement and Policy Statements on Punishment and Dominance, [avsabonline.org](http://avsabonline.org)

## Recommended Reading

- John Bradshaw, *In Defence of Dogs: Why Dogs Need Our Understanding*
- John Bradshaw, *Dog Sense: How the New Science of Dog Behavior Can Make You a Better Friend to Your Pet*
- Kris Butler, *Therapy Dogs Today: Their Gifts, Our Obligation*
- Suzanne Clothier, *Bones Would Rain from the Sky: Deepening Our Relationships with Dogs*, [suzanneclothier.com](http://suzanneclothier.com)
- Jean Donaldson, *Culture Clash*, [academyfordogtrainers.com](http://academyfordogtrainers.com)
- Alexandra Horowitz, *Inside of a Dog: What Dogs See, Smell & Know*, [dogcognition.com](http://dogcognition.com)
- Ann Howie, *Teaming with Your Therapy Dog*, [humananimalsolutions.com](http://humananimalsolutions.com)
- James O'Heare, *Empowerment Training: Training for Creativity, Persistence, Industriousness, Resilience & Behavioral Well-Being*, [jamesoheare.com](http://jamesoheare.com)
- Karen Pryor, *Don't Shoot the Dog: The New Art of Teaching & Training*, [clickertraining.com](http://clickertraining.com)
- Pamela Reid, *Excelerated Learning: Explaining How Dogs Learn & How Best to Teach Them*
- Kathy Sdao, *Plenty in Life is Free: Reflections on Dogs, Training & Finding Grace*, [kathysdao.com](http://kathysdao.com)

We are proud to stand with these **scientists** and **trainers** who espouse force-free training, positive reinforcement and relationship-building in the training, handling and care of animals:

- Ian Dunbar, [dogstardaily.com](http://dogstardaily.com)
- Barbara Handelman, [woofandwordpress.com](http://woofandwordpress.com)
- Emily Larlham, [dogmantics.com](http://dogmantics.com)
- Kay Laurence, [learningaboutdogs.com](http://learningaboutdogs.com)
- Patricia McConnell, [patriciamcconnell.com](http://patriciamcconnell.com)
- Leslie McDevitt, [controlunleashed.net](http://controlunleashed.net)
- Pat Miller, [peaceablepaws.com](http://peaceablepaws.com)
- Emma Parsons, [creativecanine.com](http://creativecanine.com)
- Kathy Sdao, [kathysdao.com](http://kathysdao.com)
- Sophia Yin, [drsophiayin.com](http://drsophiayin.com)

And with these **organizations**:

- American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior (AVSAB), [avsabonline.org](http://avsabonline.org)
- Institute for Animals & Society, [animalsandsociety.org](http://animalsandsociety.org)
- Latham Foundation, [latham.org](http://latham.org)
- National Canine Research Council, [nationalcanineresearchcouncil.com](http://nationalcanineresearchcouncil.com)
- Pet Professional Guild, [petprofessionalguild.com](http://petprofessionalguild.com)
- Truly Dog Friendly, [trulydogfriendly.com](http://trulydogfriendly.com)