

Information for Veterinary Professionals

How to find a qualified, assessed and regulated Behaviourist and what constitutes a Referral to a Behaviourist

1. The ABTC has four categories of professional to whom a veterinary surgeon might refer an animal with a behaviour issue: Clinical Animal Behaviourists, Veterinary Behaviourists, Accredited Animal Behaviourists and Animal Behaviour Technicians. ABTC also regulates Animal Training Instructors and Animal Trainers*.
2. Clinical Animal Behaviourists (CAB), Veterinary Behaviourists (VB) and Accredited Animal Behaviourists (AAB) work with animals that are demonstrating all types of undesirable, inappropriate, problematic or dangerous behaviour. They will only see clients on veterinary referral. See <https://abtc.org.uk/owners/types-of-practitioners/>
3. Animal Behaviour Technicians (ABT) design and implement programmes to provide preventative and first-aid behavioural advice, and work with AAB, CAB or VB in the implementation of behaviour modification and/or environmental modification plans, developed by the AAB, CAB or VB following assessment/evaluation of an animal by that same AAB, CAB or VB. <https://abtc.org.uk/owners/types-of-practitioners/>
4. The ABTC continues to recognise a strong link between the veterinary surgeon and the behaviourist in all cases, not least because of the link between some medical conditions and behavioural signs. The ABTC emphasises the importance of being part of the VetLed Team in that it requires that all practitioners on the CAB/VB/AAB registers will work only on veterinary referral, regardless of species.
5. Thus, a potential client who contacts the CAB/VB/AAB directly is asked to contact their veterinary surgeon prior to an appointment being made.
6. A client can request a referral from their veterinary surgeon or a veterinary surgeon can initiate a referral to a CAB/VB/AAB. In both cases following discussion with the client, a clinical assessment of the case will need to be made.
7. A referral can take many forms. Some are more formal as in the completion of a referral form and some less so, in the form of an email communication or telephone conversation.
8. It is advisable to use the most convenient method for all involved, particularly to ensure the ease of the process for the referring veterinary surgeon in terms of time undertaken.
9. It is recommended that both the CAB/VB/AAB and the veterinary practice note the referral on their records for the animal, and whether it was from 'the practice' or a specific veterinary surgeon.
10. We recommend that a specific veterinary surgeon is provided as point of contact.

11. The CAB/VB/AAB should be provided with the animal's full medical history, shared with the client's consent.
12. This is to assist the CAB/VB/AAB in understanding the animal's full behavioural history as periods of illness/pain/ hospitalisation at any point in the animal's life can influence aspects of later behaviour.
13. It is preferable and strongly recommended for a clinical examination to be carried out within a reasonable time before the behaviour consultation. This will assist in establishing whether there is any involvement of a current/ recent medical condition in the behavioural signs. However, it is appreciated that this may not always be practical, or indeed possible, given individual animal temperaments and other extenuating circumstances. Individual discretion should be used on a case-by-case basis by the veterinary surgeon and CAB/VB/AAB and adjusted as the behavioural modification process requires.
14. The referring vet should be kept informed by the CAB/VB/AAB of the outcome and any developments of the case. This should include an initial written report and further communication as appropriate to the individual case.
15. Maintaining such communication is core to the working of the VetLed Team.
16. This should be a reciprocal arrangement so that any drugs prescribed or treatment relevant to the behaviours are shared with the CAB/VB/AAB.
17. Practitioners on the ABTC CAB/VB/AAB Register may discuss the options for using psychoactive medications with a client as part of a behaviour modification programme. However, unless they are a veterinary behaviourist (see point 18), they must not discuss the use of specific medications with a client as this remains the responsibility of the referring vet. Instead, the ABTC practitioner should explain to the client that they will contact the referring vet about the possible use of medication to assist in the behavioural advice being given.
18. The Behaviourist may suggest the use of medication to the referring vet as part of case discussions. They may advise as appropriate with regards to specific classes of drugs or individual medications. The decision of which medications to use and the prescribing of these remains the responsibility of the referring vet.
19. Veterinary behaviourists may hold more specific discussions with a client regarding particular medications, and may also prescribe if they choose. However, the ABTC recommends that open communication regarding the use of medication should be continued between the veterinary behaviourist and the referring vet as part of the referral process.
20. Some veterinary practices may have a long-standing relationship with a Behaviourist and ABTC encourages a close working relationship. Referring to an ABTC registered practitioner ensures that the Behaviourist has proven their competence by a fully assessed procedure, and that there is a formal complaints process if necessary. ABTC has wide support from across the veterinary professional bodies including BVA, BSAVA and BVNA and from all the major animal welfare organisations, including RSPCA, Dogs Trust, Cats Protection, the Horse Trust and NEWC. Hence the ABTC has established standard post-nominals that practitioners on the ABTC Registers may use.

21. The format is set out below:

- Animal Trainer ABTC-AT
- Animal Training Instructor ABTC-ATI
- Animal Behaviour Technician ABTC-ABT
- Accredited Animal Behaviourist ABTC-AAB
- Clinical Animal Behaviourist ABTC-CAB
- Veterinary Behaviourist ABTC-VB
- Expert Witness ABTC-EW

22. While the use of the post-nominals is not compulsory, practitioners are encouraged to use them. When a practitioner is on more than one register multiple post-nominals may be used e.g. J Bloggs ABTC-AT, ABTC-CAB.

23. All ABTC registered practitioners use scientific based, welfare friendly practices appropriate for the case in hand. Their competence is assured by practical assessment and CPD is required to ensure their knowledge is current.

24. There are a number of routes to attain qualification as a CAB and all require the same level of knowledge and understanding and assessed performance skills. Some behaviourists may refer to themselves as 'Certified Clinical Animal Behaviourists' (CCAB) whilst others use CAB. There is no difference in the required standard of competence.

25. Practitioners on the ABTC Registers are required to have appropriate insurance.

26. Should a veterinarian/veterinary practice have any queries about referring to a practitioner on the ABTC register, please view the ABTC Code of Professional Conduct (<https://abtc.org.uk/practitioners-info/>) If this does not answer their query, they should contact the ABTC office (admin@abtc.org.uk)

27. Should a veterinarian/veterinary practice have any complaint about a practitioner on the ABTC register, they should lodge their complaint, in the first instance, with the practitioner's member organisation. If you are not sure who this is please contact admin@abtc.org.uk

28. Further information about ABTC registers can be found here: <https://abtc.org.uk/practitioners-info>

29. Further BSAVA resources:

“Referral for Behaviour or Training”:

https://www.bsava.com/Portals/0/resources/documents/secure/PS_behaviour_referral_230117.pdf?ver=2017-01-23-112409-937

“Animal Behaviour and Training Associations:

https://www.bsava.com/Portals/0/resources/documents/secure/PS_Behaviour_and_Training%20Associations_23012017.pdf?ver=2017-01-23-112015-123

*For your information:

Animal Trainer (AT) – works directly with an animal to train them to carry out required behaviours. May work in conjunction with AAB, ABT, CAB or VB for rehabilitation training.

Animal Training Instructor (ATI) – works with owner/handler and animal e.g. dog training classes. Teaches owner/handler how to train their animal to carry out required behaviours. May work in conjunction with AAB, ABT, CAB or VB for rehabilitation training.

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