

## **Animal Behaviour and Training Council Statement on the LIFE Model**

We at the Animal Behaviour and Training Council (ABTC) are dedicated to promoting the highest standards of animal welfare. Dr Eduardo Fernandez's recent paper on the [LIFE Model](#) (Least Inhibitive Functionally Effective) offers a comprehensive approach to companion animal welfare and provides valuable insights into enhancing our practices.

The LIFE Model highlights the limitations and potential adverse effects of the Least Invasive Minimally Aversive (LIMA) approach. As Fernandez (2024) highlights, one of the biggest problems for the LIMA approach is the justification it has enabled for regularly using aversive stimuli or coercive training methods and is demonstrated in Lindsay's (2005) book. As Lindsay states:

*“According to the least intrusive and minimally aversive (LIMA) model, aversives are ranked in terms of their relative severity and intrusiveness, requiring that the trainer apply a less aversive technique before advancing to a more aversive one.” (Lindsay, 2005, p. 29; as cited by Fernandez, 2024).*

*Thus, Lindsay was making an argument for the use of coercive training techniques, with his handbook providing pictures and descriptions of various aversive training tools. For example, in another description, Lindsay states:*

*“The proper use of the prong collar as a shaping and polishing tool requires significant instruction, but with respect to basic control uses novice trainers can rapidly master the prong collar.” (Lindsay, 2005, p. 31; as cited by Fernandez, 2024).*

*What becomes clear in these statements is that LIMA was not intended to be an attempt to minimize the use of aversive stimuli, as many modern force-free trainers have conceptualized. Instead, Lindsay intended LIMA to be a framework to help trainers select their aversive stimuli and tools (Fernandez, 2024).*

### **Limitations of the LIMA Approach**

While the Least Invasive Minimally Aversive (LIMA) approach is well-intentioned, as outlined previously, it has significant limitations that can inadvertently compromise animal welfare. This includes

1. **Narrow focus:** LIMA primarily concentrates on minimising aversive stimuli without fully addressing the animal's comprehensive welfare needs, including emotional, physiological, and behavioural aspects.
2. **Reactive measures:** LIMA often employs a reactive approach to behavioural issues, which can lead to incomplete resolutions that fail to address underlying causes of stress or anxiety in animals.
3. **Welfare gaps:** By focusing mainly on reducing immediate discomfort, LIMA might overlook chronic stressors or environmental factors that negatively impact an animal's long-term well-being.

### **Advantages of the LIFE Model**

The LIFE Model, proposed by Dr Eduardo Fernandez, provides a holistic framework that surmounts the limitations of LIMA and reduces the risk of it being used to justify inappropriate handling techniques, methods, and equipment by focusing on:

1. **Conducting a comprehensive welfare assessment:** The model emphasises evaluating an animal's overall quality of life, considering factors such as natural behaviours, emotional states, and physiological health.
2. **Taking a proactive approach:** It advocates for proactive measures in behaviour therapy and training, aiming to prevent issues rather than merely reacting to them.
3. **Enhancing the human-animal bond:** By prioritising the animal's complete well-being, the LIFE Model fosters stronger, healthier relationships between animals and their guardians.

Implementing the LIFE Model aligns with ABTC's mission to ensure that animal welfare remains at the forefront of our practices. We urge all members to review Dr Fernandez's paper and consider adopting this model to enhance the effectiveness and ethical standards of their work.

*Footnote: see LIFE [infographic](#), [history](#) and [references](#) for further information.*

<https://abtc.org.uk/>

# A Modern Approach To Thinking About Ethics and Animal Training



## LEAST INHIBITIVE, FUNCTIONALLY EFFECTIVE

The **Least Inhibitive, Functionally Effective (LIFE)** approach provides a framework that adheres closely to the behavioral and welfare-focused sciences. It considers the impact of training methods on the wellbeing of both human and non-human lives.

The LIFE approach emphasizes the important interplay between **training success** and **positive welfare**.



### INCREASE MEANINGFUL CHOICES

Least inhibitive means removing choice restrictions to increase quality of life.

- Avoid environmental restrictions to motivate behavior, such as food deprivation.
- Improve meaningful options by expanding response alternatives and behavioral repertoires.



### IDENTIFY BEHAVIORAL FUNCTIONS

Assess causes of a behavior so that we can directly connect them to behavior change plans.

- Collect data based on observations and behavior change manipulations.
- Match causes of a behavior so that we can directly connect them to behavior change plans.



### MAXIMIZE TRAINING SUCCESS

Effectiveness is only one component of success. Impact of training on welfare is also important.

- Consider other welfare impacts, such as context and human-animal interactions.
- Training success includes positive welfare during and after training sessions.

## References

- Fernandez, E.J. (2023) The least inhibitive, functionally effective (LIFE) model: A new framework for ethical animal training practices. *Journal of Veterinary Behavior*; 71: 63-68. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1558787823001430?via%3Dihub>
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- Novack LI, Schnell-Peskin L, Feuerbacher E, Fernandez EJ. The Science and Social Validity of Companion Animal Welfare: Functionally Defined Parameters in a Multidisciplinary Field. *Animals*. 2023; 13(11):1850. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani13111850>