

ABTC Standard - Animal Behaviour Technician

Overview

This Standard relates to the design and implementation of programmes to provide preventative and behavioural first-aid recommendations to owners/guardians/handlers and/or co-professionals, based on best practice and scientific evidence. This Standard also includes the implementation of behaviour modification and/or environmental modification plans, developed by a Clinical Animal Behaviourist (CAB), Veterinary Animal Behaviourist (VB) or Accredited Animal Behaviourist (AAB) following assessment/evaluation of an animal by that same CAB, VB or AAB. This Standard describes the skills and competences necessary for effective communication with owners/guardians/handlers and/or co-professionals, when providing information on how to improve animal welfare. This Standard is suitable for those working in the animal care sector, with responsibility for managing humane approaches to the behaviour of animals. It is suitable for:

- Veterinary Nurses (working with any species)
- Practitioners working in a rescue setting (working with any species)
- Practitioners working in private practice (working with any species)

All of whom may do the following:

- Devise and/or implement procedures to safeguard against the development of undesired behaviours
- Provide preventative information to owners/guardians/handlers, and co-professionals
- Provide behavioural first-aid information to owners/guardians/handlers prior to referral to a suitably qualified practitioner
- Implement a behaviour modification plan developed by a Clinical Animal Behaviourist (CAB), Veterinary Behaviourist (VB) or Accredited Animal Behaviourist (AAB), following an assessment/evaluation by that same CAB, VB or AAB. This could be alongside the CAB/VB/AAB or independently – as agreed by both parties

The Veterinary Surgeons Act (1966) limits the activities which may be carried out by those who are not registered veterinary surgeons. All activities should be carried out taking into account the constraints of the Veterinary Surgeons Act.

In accordance with the ABTC Code of Professional Conduct, all individual practitioners are required to work within this ABTC Standard and their professional competences. All cases that Registered Charity Numbers 1164009 (England & Wales), SC047256 (Scotland)

are, or develop beyond the scope of this ABTC Standard should be referred on responsibly (see Code of Conduct section 1.2).

All practitioners should be familiar with the Standard for their role and that of all other ABTC roles so that they understand the differences between the roles and refer accordingly.

Knowledge and understanding - This Standard is at Level 5

You need to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of these learning outcomes:

Animal Behaviour

1. Evaluate and analyse the ethology of vertebrate animals, including perceptual abilities, maintenance and survival behaviours and communication, their function and their motivational basis in a range of animal species and taxa.
2. Recognise, evaluate and report on the behavioural states of a range of animal species and those that most commonly contribute to the caseload of the practitioners they might refer to, including signals indicative of ill health as well as key behavioural states such as fear, nervousness, aggression, frustration, threat-reduction, play and relaxation.
3. Evaluate the effects of behavioural ontogeny; to include sensitive periods, socialisation and attachment theory in a range of animals and their possible role in the development of unwanted behaviours.
4. Evaluate the interaction between biological and evolutionary influences and the environment in which an animal is kept, and their roles in the development of behavioural disorders for a range of animal species.

Animal Health and Welfare

5. Compare, analyse and evaluate the key ethological, psychological and physiological concepts that underpin animal welfare in a range of taxa.
6. Evaluate the welfare considerations in the management and training of animals.
7. Demonstrate an awareness of disease presentation, risk and mitigation in a range of species, as well as individual animals seen in practice.
8. Demonstrate understanding of both intra and inter specific risks (human to human/and zoonoses) and how to identify/ detect relevant threats; reporting procedures; management of the training and consultation environment.

Animal Learning and Training

9. Evaluate how animals learn to include habituation; sensitisation, classical conditioning, operant conditioning, insight and social learning, animal cognition and the concept of sentience.
10. Evaluate the principles underlying unwanted behaviours and how they may develop and be maintained.
11. Evaluate the principles and rationale behind the use of a range of training, preventative and behavioural modification techniques, to include (but not limited to) systematic desensitisation, counter-conditioning and the use of clickers or other markers/conditioned reinforcers.
12. Evaluate and analyse the strategies and range of techniques for the implementation of preventative behavioural interventions in animals of all ages; the rationale for their use/application; and the strengths and weaknesses of each.

The Interaction between Health and Behaviour

13. Explain the functional anatomy and physiology of animals and the role of the nervous and endocrine systems in mediating behaviour.
14. Demonstrate awareness of the signs of physical ill-health, common conditions influencing behaviour and associated veterinary terminology.
15. Demonstrate awareness of the behavioural indicators and consequences of mental and emotional state (both positive and negative).
16. Evaluate the mode of action and application of the major classes of psychopharmaceutical medications used in clinical animal behaviour.
17. Evaluate commonly used complementary, or non-prescription therapies or products, their claimed/potential efficacy and the ethics of their use.

Clinical Procedures

18. Demonstrate understanding of the range of common behavioural disorders in animals.
19. Explain the application of the principles of ethology and learning theory for the prevention of unwanted behaviour and/or giving of first aid behavioural information.
20. Demonstrate the ability to construct and deliver structured behaviour change programmes to effectively address the delivery of structured programmes for the prevention of unwanted behaviour and/or giving of first aid behavioural information, that are likely to be effective for target behaviours identified.

21. Effective techniques for the measurement and recording of progress of an animal/animals through a remedial plan for behaviour change and the reporting of progress to owners/guardians/handlers and other professionals.
22. Assess situations where further action may be necessary, including ways in which compliance with an extended programme for the prevention of unwanted behaviour and/or giving of first aid behavioural information, may be encouraged.
23. Demonstrate awareness of a range of effective and inclusive communication techniques when collecting and disseminating information, providing support and when assessing and resolving issues relating to owner/guardian/handler understanding.
24. Demonstrate awareness of the common professional, ethical or other issues that need to be considered in all settings as part of the professional interactions of this role, and the need to refer to other professionals.
25. Recognise signs of compassion fatigue and emotional burden in self, colleagues and owner/guardian/handler, and when and where to seek support.
26. Demonstrate awareness of the potential environmental impacts associated with the role, and how they can be minimised.

Law and Ethics

27. Demonstrate awareness of legislation relating to ownership, welfare and use of animals; employment law, health and safety legislation, safeguarding, DEI and the UK-GDPR (United Kingdom General Data Protection Regulation). This includes the implications and professional liability for the Animal Behaviour Technician, allied professionals, clients, veterinary staff and others.
28. Demonstrate awareness of the ethical frameworks and Codes of Practice relating to the welfare, ownership and use of animals.

Practical Skills

Whilst carrying out this role you must be able to:

Welfare and Legislation

1. Evaluate the needs of a range of animal species and taxa and how these may be provided for whilst under your duty of care.
2. Identify and act in ways that best ensures the well-being of the animal, protecting and promoting welfare both within the short and long term.
3. Identify, comply with, and take reasonable steps to educate others to comply with, current animal health and welfare legislation, industry regulations, organisational policies, professional codes, and other legislation, relevant to the animals being worked with; take any action necessary to comply with these.

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4. Undertake risk assessments in line with current health and safety legislation, first aid, disease control and biosecurity.

Evaluating and Modifying Behaviour

5. Gather evidence about the behaviour of the animal from all sources identified as likely to provide relevant information. This could include direct observation, reviewing the case history/notes, discussion with owner/guardian/handler and other relevant professionals. Evaluate the quality of this evidence and act to remedy any areas of concern or deficiency in it.
6. For the prevention of unwanted behaviour and/or giving first aid behavioural information, evaluate the effect of physical factors on the animal's behaviour and areas of concern identified, to include: species, breed, parentage, sex, age, medical conditions, physiological status, developmental history, husbandry and management practices, and interactions with people.
7. For the prevention of unwanted behaviour and/or giving of first aid behavioural information, evaluate the impact of external factors on the behaviour of the animal and areas of concern identified, to include: immediate surroundings, wider environment, environmental pressures, ethological requirements, time budgets, and previous experiences.
8. For the prevention of unwanted behaviour and/or giving of first aid behavioural information, evaluate the impact of husbandry/management practices on the behaviour of the animal and areas of concern identified, including: presence/absence of environmental enrichment, social contact, physical activity, interactions and relationship with owner/guardian/handler and other humans, diet.
9. Evaluate issues concerning the safety, efficacy and reliability of complementary and alternative or non-prescription or prescribed therapies or products.
10. Know how to respond to, evaluate and report on the behavioural states of kept domestic animals and those that most commonly contribute to the caseload of a CAB, to include signals indicative of key behavioural states such as fear, nervousness, aggression, ill health, threat-reduction, pain and relaxation.
11. Demonstrate skill and competency in the selection and use of a wide range of preventative and first aid behaviour techniques and ethical training aids. Be able to teach owners/guardians/handlers how to apply these techniques and training aids to ensure their effective use, protect against their misuse, and ensure owners/guardians/handlers protect the welfare of the animal.
12. Devise and implement a structured programme for the prevention of unwanted behaviour and/or giving of first aid behavioural information that identifies and sets realistic goals and time scales for monitoring of its progress and assessment of its success, making reasonable adjustments for owner/guardian/handler according to their needs and abilities.

13. Implement a structured behaviour modification plan devised by a Clinical Animal Behaviourist, Veterinary Behaviourist or Accredited Animal Behaviourist, identifying and setting realistic goals and time scales for monitoring of its progress and assessment of its success, making reasonable adjustments for owner/guardian/handler according to their needs and abilities.
14. Explain why a particular preventative or first aid behavioural programme has been selected from available options.
15. Evaluate the effectiveness of the preventative or first aid behavioural programme through follow-ups and feedback which may include direct observation of the animal and liaison with those involved with the animal's care. Revise the remedial programme in response to this feedback and its effectiveness. (Where the ABT is working on a behavioural modification programme devised by a Clinical Animal Behaviourist, Accredited Animal Behaviourist or Veterinary Behaviourist, revisions to the programme must be directed by them).
16. Maintain records on each animal identifying the success of different approaches based on measurable outcomes.

Animal Learning and Training

17. Apply the principles of animal learning theory to humane training methods to achieve agreed goals.
18. Demonstrate the ability to train an animal towards the desired objectives, in a number of different ways, taking into account the context, species, type, breed, developmental stage and physical capabilities.

Counselling and Communication

19. Demonstrate the use of effective communication techniques and tools to explain to owners/guardians/handlers, the identified issues, their possible causes and the rationale for behavioural first aid or preventative recommendations selected.
20. Discuss and agree a programme for the prevention of unwanted behaviour, and/or first aid behavioural recommendations with the owner/guardian/handler and others involved with the animal.
21. Take steps to ensure the owner/guardian/handler is aware of their role in the delivery of an effective programme and the importance of maintaining the desired change to behaviour once it is achieved. Rectify areas of misunderstanding, confusion or concern of the owner/guardian/handler.
22. Liaise with other allied professionals and organisations involved in the care of the animal to ensure a consistent approach that protects animal welfare and is legally compliant.

23. Identify any professional, ethical or other issues that have arisen when working with the animal, owner/guardian/handler or other individual and take action to address these.

Personal Reflection and Development

24. Evaluate your own practice and reflect on any improvements that could be made.
25. Identify gaps in own knowledge and understanding; and plan, record and evaluate a personal Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme to address these.
26. Maintain a high level of professional conduct including an awareness of own limitations and how, when and where to refer cases on.