



How to Select a Behavior Consultant **A Pet Owner's Guide**

Have your pet examined by a veterinarian for a complete physical examination. More than 20% of dogs with behavior problems who were not checked by a veterinarian in more than 6 months also had a health problem. There is no use wasting money on a behavior problem when there may be a contributing health factor.

Ask for a referral. Ask your veterinarian, groomer, friends with pets and even your local animal shelters who they would recommend and why. Do they know whom they are recommending and what is the basis for their recommendation?

Qualify the professional. Call the specialist and find out how he or she goes about working with problem pets. If they are operating on the highest ethical standards, they will want to know a great deal about you, your pet's health and a history of the problem from beginning to end. They should be especially interested in what steps you have already taken to solve the problem yourself or with other assistance.

Questions to ask the consultant:

1. Where and how long will the appointment be? (1 to 2 hours are usually sufficient.)
2. Who must attend? (Be sure everyone involved can and should attend.)
3. What will we be doing? (Get operational descriptions such as sitting and talking, working with the dog.)
4. How many appointments will be required? (This may vary depending on the problem. Follow up is essential!)
5. Will any special equipment be required or encouraged? If so, what? (This will reveal whether or not shock collars, prong collars, head collars or other items will be used. Get descriptions of what they are and how they will be used. Avoid "one-size-fits-all" professionals that use the same equipment and the same techniques on all dogs. Training and protocols must be tailored specifically to the dog.)
6. What is the most severe physical treatment that may be required assuming the worst? (This lets you know if shocking, kneeing, kicking, hitting, jerking, hanging, alpha rollovers, etc. will be inflicted on your dog.)
7. How much will it cost? (This will vary tremendously. Be sure the fee is something you can and are willing to pay given your level of confidence in the specialist. Be sure to ask about additional charges for equipment.)
8. Do you offer any guarantees? (No ethical professional can offer guarantees on a living creature's behavior. Be very wary if you are given guarantees or any absolutes regarding the outcome of a treatment or training program.)
9. Are you a trainer or a behavior expert? (Trainers advise a way to control behavior while behavior experts find the cause of the behavior leaving less to control. Determine which is needed for your problem.)

With these questions answered, you can qualify the specialist on three accounts:

1. The humaneness of the methods to be employed and the compatibility to your training style. You have to feel comfortable with the methods that would be used on your dog.
2. The cost of the program in your money, time, and effort.
3. How you feel about working with this person. Beware of signing up for multi-visit programs before you know how you and the professional work together. If you cannot communicate smoothly during explanations about the program, you are apt to have even more difficulty when working with causes and corrections!

And finally, watch out for specialists who say they can *do it for you*. You need to be the one involved in carrying out the solution, not them. Who lives with the pet? Also, watch out for anyone who leads you to believe this is going to be easy. Solving a pet behavior problem is rarely simple. It requires your mental and financial effort as well as some emotional adjustments on the part of all family members.