

## How does a Veterinary Behaviorist differ from a dog trainer?

Veterinary Behaviorists are veterinarians who are knowledgeable in all aspects of animal behavior. They are required to stay current on the most recent scientific findings through research and attending and presenting at professional continuing education meetings. Good trainers have knowledge of behavior, but not at the depth or breadth that is expected of a Veterinary Behaviorist. While a trainer may teach an animal to perform certain actions in response to a command, obedience training does not usually get to the root cause of a behavioral issue or solve the behavioral problem. Be aware that some training techniques are considered questionable and inhumane in their approach.

## Why is behavioral medicine important?

*Behavioral problems are a leading cause of relinquishment of dogs and cats to animal shelters in the United States.*

While animals with behavioral problems often are considered to “misbehave”, they may have a physical cause for the problem, be responding to inconsistent interactions with the people around them, and/or have had a poor upbringing. Behavioral problems are complex and can have many causes; and it takes a concerted effort under the guidance of a trained professional to bring about change. Behavioral medicine requires a broad knowledge of the physical and emotional health of animals, as well as the knowledge of how to help clients implement the prescribed treatment plan.



*Veterinary Behaviorists are trained to address behavioral problems, as well as underlying medical conditions, that may either cause or contribute to an inappropriate behavior.*

For more information about the  
American College of Veterinary Behaviorists  
visit the website [www.dacvb.org](http://www.dacvb.org)



**ACVB** American College of  
Veterinary Behaviorists

### ACVB Mission

The mission of the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists is to advance the behavioral health of animals through the certification of veterinary behavior specialists and the provision of science-based education.



## What is a VETERINARY BEHAVIORIST?





### What is a Veterinary Behaviorist?

Veterinary Behaviorists have achieved board-certification in the specialty of Veterinary Behavior. Board-certified specialists are known as Diplomates. These veterinarians work with individual pet owners, other animal professionals, and facilities that care for animals in order to manage behavior problems and improve the well-being of animals.

Behavioral problems can result from a neurochemical imbalance, a medical condition, learned fearful associations, or conflict over rules and social structure. A Veterinary Behaviorist is in a unique position to diagnose medical conditions that can affect a pet's behavior, as well as treat conditions that are purely behavioral.

### How does someone become a Veterinary Behaviorist?

A Veterinary Behaviorist is first and foremost a veterinarian. Beyond their veterinary degree, they have received additional training, generally at least 3 years, in Veterinary Behavior through a recognized training program, either in a residency program at a College of Veterinary Medicine or through an individually mentored training program. Additionally, they have authored a published research project in this field, written case reports, and passed a 2-day examination.

### What kinds of behavioral problems are treated by a Veterinary Behaviorist?

Veterinary behaviorists are trained to treat behavioral problems in all types of animals, from dogs and cats to horses and birds. Below are some examples of the problems that are best evaluated and treated by a Veterinary Behaviorist.

#### *Aggression toward people*

Aggression is a complex problem, and there are many different reasons why an animal may display aggressive behavior. Additionally, it can be a sign of an underlying physical problem. If aggression is mismanaged, or if help is not sought early on in the progression of the problem, it often worsens. Because the potential consequences and liability are so serious, it is recommended that you get professional help from a Veterinary Behaviorist for any animal displaying aggressive behaviors.

#### *Aggression toward other animals*

This problem is common in animals, and can be due to various causes. Aggressive behavior can lead to big problems for owners and animals alike. In order to prevent serious consequences, it is imperative to seek help before the behavior progresses.

#### *Anxiety*

Anxiety, fears and phobias are considered common primary or underlying causes of many behavioral conditions. For example, it is estimated that 17% of dogs suffer from separation anxiety, a primary anxiety related condition. Noise or storm phobias are also common primary phobias. Other behaviors such as aggression or compulsive disorders may be secondary to an underlying anxiety or fear. Additionally, stress or anxiety can aggravate certain medical conditions. When animals suffer from anxiety it is critical to seek help from a Veterinary Behaviorist as they have the ability to prescribe medications, if indicated, in combination with behavioral modification.

#### *Urine marking and inappropriate elimination*

Urine marking is often related to stressors in a pet's household. Attempting to resolve this problem may require help from a Veterinary Behaviorist, who will take the entire situation into consideration, and can prescribe specific behavior modification techniques, with or without medication. In regards to other types of inappropriate elimination in pets, the many possible causes of these problems are most appropriately diagnosed by a Veterinary Behaviorist.

#### *Other problem behaviors*

Other behavior problems that are treated by Veterinary Behaviorists include, but are not limited to, excessive barking, phobias, eating of non-food objects, overgrooming, excessive vocalization, and repetitive behaviors (such as those due to an underlying obsessive-compulsive disorder).

### What other animals do Veterinary Behaviorists treat?

Veterinary behaviorists do not just treat dogs and cats, but also treat horses, birds, production animals, and laboratory animals. They have the full breadth and depth of knowledge to understand the behavior of all animals, as well as the ability to diagnose and treat underlying medical problems that can be related to the animal's behavioral problems.

Birds commonly display problem behaviors, such as feather-picking. Physical problems often occur in conjunction with these behavior problems. It is important that these pets be seen by a professional such as a Veterinary Behaviorist to take all of this into consideration.

Horses can display problem behaviors related to aggression and can pose a huge threat to both human and animal safety, potentially to an even greater degree than aggressive dogs and cats. Horses also present for stereotypic or other repetitive behaviors, such as cribbing or weaving. These behaviors are often related to underlying medical conditions and are also best evaluated by a Veterinary Behaviorist.

Production and laboratory animals should be raised in the most humane manner feasible, and Veterinary Behaviorists consult with people in these fields to help this happen.

### What other things do Veterinary Behaviorists do?

In addition to treating owned animals, Veterinary Behaviorists also hold positions in Industry, Academia, and Animal Shelters.

