

## HELP! My Companion Animal Has a Behavior Problem!

Is your dog growling at your houseguests? Is your cat using your pillow as the litter box? Is your horse sidestepping when you try to mount? Is your parrot plucking her feathers?

Animal behavior problems can be frustrating and stressful. Fortunately, professional help is available. A qualified animal behavior consultant can help you address these and many other behavior problems.

If you needed an electrician, you'd want to make sure he or she was fully qualified to work in your home. The same is true when you need the help of any professional, including an animal behavior consultant. Here are some tips to help you make sure the person you are hiring to help you with your companion animal is qualified.

- Ask how the consultant learned about animal behavior. A consultant's education may include accredited university coursework, attendance at seminars, extensive reading, writing, working under a mentor, independent study and hands-on experience working with animals.
- Research the consultant's credentials. Are they a member of a reputable professional organization, such as the International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants?
- Find out how the consultant stays current in their field. A qualified behavior consultant takes courses, attends conferences, reads literature and participates in online dialogues with colleagues so they always know the latest information.
- Notice how the consultant relates to you. Is the consultant friendly and respectful? Do you feel comfortable discussing information about your companion animal with this person? A qualified behavior consultant meets high ethical standards and will not blame you for your animal's behavior problem. While owners may inadvertently do things that create or worsen their animals' behavior problems, there are many other reasons that animals develop behavior problems.
- Learn about the consultant's approach to modifying an animal's behavior. Qualified behavior consultants use the gentlest techniques that will effectively address a behavior problem, because techniques that are unpleasant for the animal are risky and may make behavior problems even worse. While a consultant will not be able to tell you exactly what they would do to help you with your animal before they begin working with you, they should be able to give you some general information about their methods.

Do not hesitate to ask a consultant questions before you commit to hiring them. And remember, qualified behavior consultants do not guarantee success! Every animal is different and many factors can affect animal behavior, including genetic and medical issues, lack of socialization, physical or emotional trauma, as well as your own ability to follow through with recommendations. A qualified behavior consultant will do their best to help you succeed but will not promise results.

Be ready to answer some questions about your animal. A qualified professional behavior consultant will ask you questions by phone and/or e-mail, and will often use a written questionnaire. Qualified behavior consultants want to make sure that they understand your animal and are a good match for your needs.

Hiring a qualified animal behavior consultant is the first step toward addressing your animal's behavior problem and developing a better relationship with your companion. Learn more about animal behavior consultants online at the [International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants](http://www.iaabc.org), [www.iaabc.org](http://www.iaabc.org).

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