



Code of Ethical Conduct



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FORCE FREE PETS RECOGNIZES THE NEED FOR A LEVEL OF OVERSIGHT IN THE PET TRAINING AND SERVICES INDUSTRY, SPECIFICALLY REGARDING BUSINESS PRACTICES, TRANSPARENCY, AND MARKETING. WE ARE A MEMBER OF PET INDUSTRY ADVOCACY INTERNATIONAL (PIAI) THROUGH OUR MEMBERSHIP IN THE PET PROFESSIONAL GUILD (PPG).

As a member of the pet care profession, ForceFreePets recognizes that our first duty is to respect the animals in our care, the people we serve, and our colleagues.

As outlined below, ForceFreePets will continually seek to establish the highest ethical standards for our team members.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES & THE NON-NEGOTIABLES

[Guiding Principles are based on those of the Pet Professional Guild and used with their permission]



To be in any way affiliated with ForceFreePets, all team members must adhere to a strict code of conduct. Team members understand Force-Free to mean: No shock, No pain, No choke, No fear, No physical force, No compulsion-based methods are ever employed to train or care for a pet.

Definition of Force

Any definition can never be so expansive and explicit that every possible situation is addressed. This is seen everywhere in life and, most obviously, in the US legal system. Courts often cannot agree on a single interpretation of what terms and definitions mean, including physical force.

Recognizing this, we understand that in our Guiding Principles and as a general framework, physical force means “any intentional physical act against a pet that causes psychological or physical pain, harm or damage to the pet.”

Equipment

Specific equipment is covered above in our NonNegotiables. However, the use of many harnesses, head halters, collars (non-choking), and leashes would not be considered physical force under this guiding definition if 1) they are used consistently with our Guiding Principles, 2) they are used as intended and designed, and 3) they are not used in a way that is contrary to their

design and intent, i.e., not used in a manner which would cause psychological or physical pain, harm or damage.

APPLICATION OF THE CODE

The Code of Ethical Conduct applies to all team members and commits all to comply fully with the standards, codes, rules, and procedures of ForceFreePets.

Please note that a lack of knowledge about, or misunderstanding of, this Code is not in itself a defense against a breach of ethical conduct.

FORCE FREE PETS TEAM MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT

- a) Team members consider the emotional, physical, and environmental well-being of each client, including the pet and the guardian/owner/caretaker of the pet, in all actions.
- b) Team members do not condone or endorse any treatment by a pet's guardian that in any way compromises the pet's emotional, physical, or mental well-being. ForceFreePets team members will not be a party to any such acts.
- c) If a guardian insists on any treatment that in any way compromises the pet's physical, emotional or mental well-being, it is the team member's duty and responsibility, after discussion with the guardian, to terminate the relationship if an agreement cannot be reached.
 - Team members must opt-out of providing a service rather than attempt to manage an unethical course of action.
 - Team members consult within the boundaries of their competence.
 - Team members will refer to competent professionals whose knowledge and/or skill level is appropriate to the individual case's needs.
 - Team Members will only refer to other professionals who adhere to the PIAI recommended Code of conduct.
- d) Non-medical team members do not attempt to diagnose or offer a prognosis for any injury or illness.
 - Members will always recommend to the pet's guardian that any problem related to illness, or the possible need for diagnosis, will be referred to an appropriate veterinary professional.
- e) Members use procedures, protocols, and tools that are empirically based and have a proven track record.
 - To this end, it is the member's duty and responsibility to pursue ongoing education and to remain fully knowledgeable of current best practices and research.
- f) Members recognize that guardians are responsible for their pets and, therefore, have the right to make decisions about the professional treatment of their pets.

- Members are bound to honor the guardian's wishes or may choose to withdraw from providing a service should opinions conflict.
- g) Members ensure that all communications are professional and based on facts.
- Members ensure that all communications are clear to the client by using plain language or by ensuring adequate explanation of terms used.
 - Members also ensure that all communications are considered confidential unless required by law to be shared with appropriate authorities.
 - Members seek clients' written permission if information, including but not limited to photos, videos, persons associated with clients and/or their pets, is to be shared with other professionals. Client anonymity is essential if client case studies are to be used for educational purposes.
 - Confidentiality may only be breached in such cases where animal cruelty or welfare laws are contravened, and the client cannot be dissuaded from using their current approach with immediate effect.
- h) Members discuss, disagree with, or recommend industry practices and trends based on best practices and current scientific literature.
- Members may disagree with other members' methods and/or their practices, but they must refrain from ad hominem attacks.[An ad hominem attack is an attack on the character of the target]
 - Members ensure communication with colleagues and clients remains informed, objective, and civil.

C) FORCE FREE PETS BUSINESS PRACTICES

- a) Members agree to adhere to the ForceFreePetss Code of Conduct and the Non-Negotiables stated therein. Members also agree to the Best Practices laid out in the definitions of philosophy, methodology, and equipment.
- b) Members ensure that consent from a guardian to work with their pet is informed by clear explanations of the nature and purpose of the methods and/or equipment they intend to use. Similarly, members ensure that they offer explanations and answer questions about why they will not use or recommend specific methods and/or equipment. This includes:
- Making clear the proposed frequency, expected duration, and potential financial commitment for the work to be carried out by the member for the client.
 - Fully explaining the training philosophy that will be used when working with the pet.
 - Answering questions from pet guardians regarding the specific training plan and any other training approaches as raised by the client.
 - Having transparent and professional discussions with the client about any and all risks or dangers related to any potential training approaches, tools, techniques,

and/or applications, as well as any consequential or subsequent physical or emotional fallout that may occur.

- Informing the guardian of their right to refuse specific equipment, methods, or techniques and their ability to offer informed consent.
 - Informing the client that the training plan and/or outcome goals may need to be modified based on developments or progress.
 - Informing the guardian that no guarantees can be offered regarding the outcome of the training or behavior program due to the nature of applied animal behavior and limiting factors around the pet guardian such as time commitment, family circumstances, management practices, and other environmental factors.
 - Informing the guardian that any change in methods or equipment will not be undertaken before discussion and their approval.
 - Informing the guardian of their right to terminate the contract at any time.
- c) Members must not lay claim, directly or indirectly, to qualifications, competencies, or affiliations they do not possess.
- d) ForceFreePets agrees to carry professional liability insurance and other coverage where available and mandated by local requirements.
- e) Team members act legally, ethically, and morally in all personal and business operations with the general public at large by abiding with local, state, and federal laws regarding animal cruelty and all business practices, including personal conduct. In addition, members will obey the law of the land in which they operate.
- f) ForceFreePets will not tolerate discrimination or harassment of any kind and is committed to the principle of equal opportunity for all employees, members, volunteers, and contractors. We are committed to providing a business and work environment free of discrimination and harassment. All ForceFreePets business decisions are based on its business needs, mission, Guiding Principles, job requirements, and individual qualifications, without regard to race, color, religion, or belief; national, social, or ethnic origin; gender, sex (including pregnancy, gender reassignment, and maternity), age, physical, mental or sensory disability; HIV status, sexual orientation, gender identity and/or expression; marital, civil union, or domestic partnership status; past or present military service; family medical history or genetic information, family or parental status; or any other status protected by law.
- g) Team members will work with their clients to develop realistic, measurable, achievable outcomes and behavior change goals for both the pet and the guardian regarding the training program and its planned and intended results.
- h) Members recognize and accept that, when implemented, their marketing and business practices may significantly impact guardians and their pets emotionally, environmentally, physically, and psychologically. As such, members agree that it is imperative they operate to a high standard of moral Code in terms of business transparency and consumer protection. Therefore, members agree to be honest and transparent in their business marketing. This includes but is not limited to:

- Making accurate statements in a clear and transparent manner and not misleading the public regarding their service philosophy and training methods
 - Openly stating their professional philosophy, methods, and choice of operational equipment used and recommended to the client.
 - Displaying all up-to-date and valid credentials and industry affiliations obviously and transparently.
- i) Members will deal fairly with each other, clients, and the general public in the dissemination of professional information and advice at all times, including but not limited to:
- Emails
 - Social media
 - Blog posts
 - Podcasts
 - Interviews
 - Published articles
- j) ForceFreePets will ensure that for each credential level displayed for team members in their marketing material, they are up-to-date on the requisite continuing education units (CEU), when required, for each specific credential.
- k) Members agree to rely on up-to-date science within the permits of our Guiding Principles, rather than hearsay, myth, misconception, and misinformation, to lead the charge on how they will be performing their services.
- l) By accepting employment at ForceFreePets, team members agree to our standards, codes of practice, education, and training philosophies. Failure to abide by the Guiding Principles and the Code of Ethical Conduct may result in sanctions up to and including the termination of the individual's employment.

2. ETHICS REVIEW & REPORT PROCESS

ForceFreePets has an ethics review process in place with a confidential and professional reporting procedure. If we receive an ethical complaint regarding a team member, the ethics complaint will be referred to ForceFreePets management for review.

Reports of alleged ethics violations must be handled according to this policy. Complaints must be limited to alleged violations of our Ethical Code of Conduct. The responsibility for investigating alleged violations is designated to the management of ForceFreePets.

- Complaints must be made in a timely fashion; allegations of violations occurring more than thirty (30) days prior will be considered only under special circumstances as determined by the management of ForceFreePets.
- Any person that feels they have been treated in a fashion that violates our Code of Ethical Conduct may file a complaint. Management will only consider complaints

filed on behalf of a third party if the complaint is accompanied by verifiable independent evidence such as publicly available records, reports, business records, including those of a public agency, judgments of a court, marketing advertisements, commercial documents, and reports, commercial publications and the like.

- All ethics complaints will be investigated and handled within an appropriate timeline.

A) FILING A REPORT OF AN ALLEGED MEMBERSHIP VIOLATION

- The individual filing the alleged violation must present the allegation to ForceFreePets management in writing.
- The report will remain confidential.
- The following information must be included in the alleged violation report:
 - The names of the alleged violator and the actual complainant in reference to the violation. This must be specific. The complaint must directly reference which area of the Code the complainant feels has been violated by including the actual quoted text in their report.
 - A specific description including when and where the violation was alleged to have occurred, who was involved, and what happened.

B) REPORT RECEIPT

- Management will acknowledge receipt of the alleged violation without comment within 24 hours of receipt.
- The individual filing the report will be notified to keep the complaint confidential; this means no information about the complaint will be discussed with any other person. If a ForceFreePets team member breaches confidentiality, it may be considered a violation of our Code of Ethical Conduct.
- The complaint details will be kept confidential to preserve the organizational ability to fairly and objectively interact with the member.

C) THE INVESTIGATION

- Management will review the complaint. Then, if necessary, they will gather more information and schedule an interview with the complainant.
- If the initial review indicates that the alleged infraction is not a violation of the organization's Code of Ethics, then the complainant will be notified in writing, and no investigation will be pursued unless further facts or evidence is proffered.
- If it appears that a violation of our Code of Ethical Conduct has occurred based on the preponderance of the evidence (is more likely to be true than not), then management will notify the individual or group that are the subjects of the complaint and provide seven (7) calendar days for a reply. If there is no reply to the complaint notification, then Management will make a decision based on all available information.

- Once all the information has been gathered, Management will determine the sanctions; this may include:
 - Education. The need for education and mentoring.
 - Employment Probation. From one week up to six months. This may be combined with education.
 - Exclusion. Termination of employment.

E) CONFIDENTIALITY MANDATE

- All involved parties shall maintain complete confidentiality throughout the process.
- Once a determination has been made, the parties involved will be notified that a decision has been made.
- Details of the determination will remain private.
- A violation of confidentiality by any party involved in the matter will be considered a violation of our Code of Conduct.