

# HOW TO FIND A GOOD CAT BEHAVIOURIST

A cat behaviourist (often called a Cat Behaviour Counsellor or Consultant) is a professional person who helps owners to resolve or understand any kind of behaviour in their cats that is worrying them or they find difficult. Some behaviourists are also vets and tend to be called Veterinary Behaviourists.

Choosing a behaviourist to help with a problem can be challenging, as the profession is not regulated like it is with vets, doctors or lawyers. So, in theory, anyone can advertise their services but not have the necessary academic qualifications and experience to do the job properly.

## **How do I know a person has the right qualifications?**

There are also various professional associations for pet behaviour counsellors in the UK; for example, the Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors (APBC) or the Fellowship of Animal Behaviour Clinicians (FABC).

The Animal Behaviour and Training Council (ABTC) is a regulatory body and the only welfare charity that is mainly concerned with protecting the welfare and wellbeing of animals undergoing training and behaviour interventions.

It maintains a national register of appropriately qualified behaviourists and is endorsed by Battersea Dogs and Cats Home and major UK animal welfare charities, behaviour and veterinary organisations.

Experience and qualifications are essential and your vet should be able to recommend someone if they have used a behaviourist before and been pleased with their work.

Many behaviourists work mostly with dogs but this doesn't mean that they will not be able to help you; many practitioners who work with a number of species are extremely effective. However, particularly with more complex cases, it can be beneficial to work with someone with a particular interest and experience with cats.

## **TOP TIP:**

All reputable pet behaviour counsellors work on referral from vets only. Many changes in behaviour that occur in cats can be a direct result of a physical problem or illness so the advice of a vet should always be sought first regarding any concerning behaviour in your cat.

## **What happens if I have to see a behaviourist about my cat?**

Most behaviourists, when working with cats, will visit you in your home. If you are referred by your vet to a university-based behaviour clinic, the behaviourist may ask you to take your cat there and provide photos, floor plans and video footage of your home instead.

The behaviourist will spend a long time discussing your cat's background and the particular problem you are concerned about. They will then give you advice, guidance and instructions to follow (that will be confirmed in writing for you) so you know exactly what to do.

The advice may include, for example, making changes to your home, adopting new routines or interacting differently with your cat.

The behaviourist should work closely with your vet and may (depending on the nature of the behaviour) liaise with them to discuss the possible use of medication that will help to make your cat feel better.

There will be a great deal of information to take in but the programme they give you will be tailor-made for you, your cat and your situation. The behaviourist will also support you for an agreed period to ensure you and your cat get the most benefit from the advice.

The fees can vary according to the behaviourist's experience and location but some pet insurance companies will cover them so it is worth checking with your insurers.

## **Do I need to do anything to prepare for a visit from a cat behaviourist?**

It is essential to get the maximum benefit from the behaviourist's visit; bear in mind that the information you can provide will help the behaviourist to diagnose the problem and provide you with a solution. Here are some suggestions:

- Depending on the particular problem, it may be useful to collect video footage or photos of the behaviour or keep a diary of what you're observing (e.g. how often the problem is occurring, when it happens, what going's on at the time etc.).
- Before the visit make sure you have forwarded all the necessary paperwork to the behaviourist (including any pre-consultation questionnaire and medical notes from your vet) or you have them prepared and ready (according to the instructions from the behaviourist).
- Make some notes beforehand about important dates and facts to help you remember the sequence of events associated with the behaviour. Also make a note of any specific questions you have or any goals you wish to achieve so you don't forget to mention them on the day.
- It may be helpful, if you have young children, to ask a relative or friend to help out on the day so that you are free from distractions during the visit.
- The behaviourist may specifically request that your cat is kept indoors in preparation for the visit so you might have to plan ahead and ensure your cat is safely indoors before the visit is due to start.
- The behaviourist is there to help you and not judge you so don't be afraid to be completely open and honest about what you have or haven't done. This should be an enjoyable learning experience which helps you, as well as helping to improve your relationship with your cat as well as their welfare and quality of life for the future.

## **Useful References**

The websites for the APBC, ABTC and FABC can be found below for more information and help in finding a suitable person in your area:

**[www.apbc.org.uk/help/regions](http://www.apbc.org.uk/help/regions)**

**[www.abtcouncil.org.uk/clinical-animal-behaviourists.html](http://www.abtcouncil.org.uk/clinical-animal-behaviourists.html)**

**<https://fabclinicians.org/>**