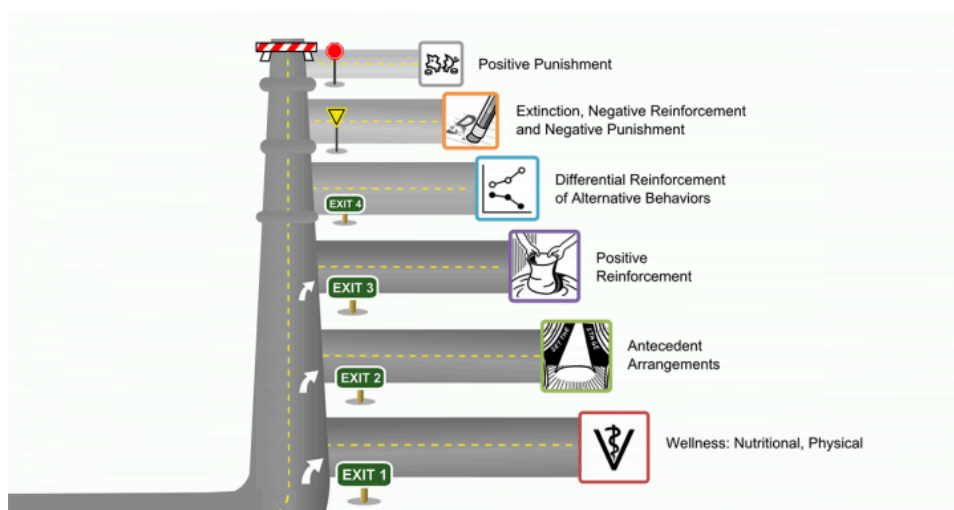




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Least Intrusive, Minimally Aversive (LIMA)

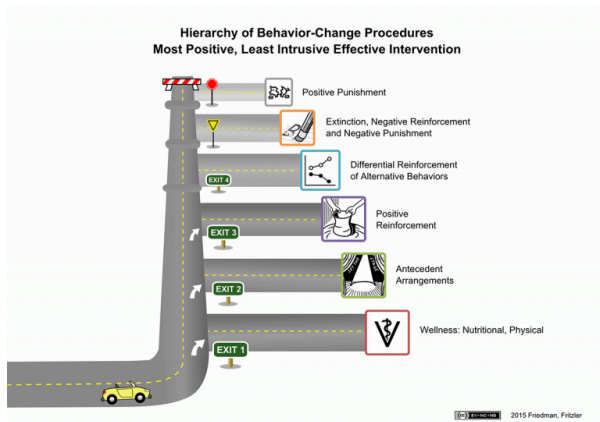
Posted on February 11, 2021 by John Reilly

In previous posts, I've mentioned the Least Intrusive, Minimally Aversive (LIMA) approach to training and behavior. So, what is it? The latest training fad? Hardly.



LIMA is an approach that has been adopted by the Association of Pet Dog Trainers (APDT) and the International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants (IAABC) as a humane and ethical practice of dog training and behavior modification.¹ Although this approach was developed for canines, it can be applied to all living creatures. LIMA incorporates a systematic hierarchy of procedures that should be followed in all cases.

Hierarchy of Procedures for Humane and Effective Practice



Source:

<https://m.iaabc.org/about/lima/hierarchy/>

1. **Health, nutritional, and physical factors:** Ensure that any indicators for possible medical, nutritional, or health factors are addressed by a licensed veterinarian. The consultant should also address potential factors in the physical environment.
2. **Antecedents:** Redesign setting events, change motivations, and add or remove discriminative stimuli (cues) for the problem behavior.
3. **Positive Reinforcement:** Employ approaches that contingently deliver a consequence to increase the probability that the desired behavior will occur.
4. **Differential Reinforcement of Alternative Behavior:** Reinforce an acceptable replacement behavior and remove the maintaining reinforcer for the problem behavior.
5. **Negative Punishment, Negative Reinforcement, or Extinction (these are not listed in any order of preference):**
 - A. Negative Punishment – Contingently withdraw a positive reinforcer to reduce the probability that the problem behavior will occur.
 - B. Negative Reinforcement – Contingently withdraw an aversive antecedent stimulus to increase the probability that the right



behavior will occur.

C. Extinction – Permanently remove the maintaining reinforcer to suppress the behavior or reduce it to baseline levels.

6. **Positive Punishment:** Contingently deliver an aversive consequence to reduce the probability that the problem behavior will occur.²

As seen above, a humane and ethical trainer/behaviorist will first determine if a behavior is caused by a medical or physiological issue. Often, they will have their clients consult a veterinarian to determine whether such an issue is contributing to the behavior. Once this first step is eliminated, they will then attempt to simply remove or modify any conditions or stimuli that are causing the behavior:

Example: Fluffy stands at the window and barks at passers-by, even though they are a reasonable distance from the house. Assuming that no medical conditions are involved, a behaviorist may recommend installing shutters or blinds that can cut off her view of the street during times that barking is an issue – like when the baby is taking a nap.

Only when these two first steps have been considered will the behaviorist try behavior modification techniques, emphasizing the positive reinforcement of desired behaviors. In all cases, a trainer should ask “What do you want the animal to do?”

By emphasizing reinforcement of desired behaviors, and minimizing any aversive measures, a trainer or behaviorist can humanely teach an animal alternative reaction to a stimulus. Using the above example, the trainer may prompt Fluffy to sit quietly when people walk past the house, or may help Fluffy’s owners desensitize her so that she only reacts when strangers come closer to the house. However, a trainer who ascribes to the LIMA approach will only use aversive measures, such as a bark collar, only when all other options have been ruled out. IAABC and ADPT sites for detailed position statements on the use of punishment during training and the use of “training aids” such as shock collars.

¹ <https://apdt.com/about/about-lima/>

² <https://m.iaabc.org/about/lima/hierarchy/>

