



WHY???

**modern trainers do not
recommend the use of aversive
equipment in training**
and why you shouldn't want to either



NO SHOCK



NO PRONG



NO CHOKE

Most people will not remember a time when it was ok to hit a child in the classroom. When it was ok to take a leather strap and whip a child across the knuckles or even the back of the legs. Many of you have never even experienced being hit by an adult as a child. This is all thanks to studies in behaviour that determined three things.

Stress shuts down learning,
The long term, effects of positive punishment on behaviour.
The negative effects it has on a relationship.

It took decades for schools to come around, but within a generation, the practices of issuing physical punishments in the classroom had all but disappeared. Not only was it detrimental to the purposes of teaching and learning, but caused long term problematic behaviours that had been demonstrated to come from the use of positive punishment.

As [this](#) article concludes:

"While positive punishment can be effective in the short term, it does not offer a lasting solution to improve a person's behavior.

People who are looking to improve a person's behavior may want to explore other behavior modification techniques that have more evidence of effectiveness, such as positive reinforcement."

Most of us understand why it is not appropriate or effective to hit a child or use other methods of physical punishment (I have seen some creative ones in my time). Parents frustrated enough to lash out and strike a child are not in control of their emotions, have low impulse control and are doing damage to their relationship with their child. Children aren't born afraid of adults. They learn that adults are there to care for them, teach them and provide for them. But the very first time you hit a child, they no longer see you as someone who will not hurt them. They learn that there are situations where you are willing to leverage your size and power to do harm to them (even if you think you are doing what is best for them). They learn to keep things from you, even lie in an effort to avoid punishment. They learn to be more careful in the things they let you see. They learn they cannot trust you in every circumstance.

Now let's talk about dogs.

The power dynamic is the same. The dependency, the size difference (most times), and the same desire to feel safe and trust in their carer are the same. A mammalian brain is a mammalian brain. The same [learning theory](#) rules apply to dogs as they do to children (sorry parents, but it is true). In fact, there are no creatures on earth that those rules do not apply to. We make small allowances for motivational differences. For instance, a child will likely be more motivated by love than a dog as human touch is something that humans need to thrive. Dogs not so much (which is why pets and praise are not the biggest motivator for most dogs. (see hierarchy of needs pyramid in the [choice handout](#))

However, the same holds true. Stressed animals do not learn as well. As I am fond of saying, "who can think with a gun to their head"? The long term effects of punishment are often prolific and explosive. And, the pain and fear are most often associated with their handlers, resulting in a less trusting, oppressive relationship.

In order to illustrate and drive home the point, I think it is fair to break down some of the myths we have heard. Often, these myths are perpetuated by uneducated and inexperienced dog trainers or, worse yet, social media influencers that haven't spent the time to education themselves, much less continued that education through seminars, workshops and conferences. Seeing dogs through the lens of a dominance based hierarchy, uneducated trainers will only see a need to gain control, suppress behaviour and ensure that one stays the "alpha". You can read why this is entirely inappropriate in our [D Word](#) handout. They often misinterpret dog behaviour as it is often in conflict with what they understand of dogs leading to [cognitive dissonance](#).



Teaching shouldn't hurt

So let's debunk some of these myths.

#1 It doesn't hurt, it's just a correction/reminder/tickle.

This one is pretty stupid on its face. By the rules of operant conditioning and classical conditioning, if it didn't hurt or scare, it wouldn't stop behaviour. Furthermore, if it doesn't hurt enough, a dog will learn to tolerate ever escalating punishment to perform the behaviour they want to ([punishment callous](#)). In order for there to be a decrease in behaviour, the punishment needs to be scary or painful enough to stop the behaviour the first time it happens. This is why using positive punishment is often considered abusive and a compromise to animal welfare. Often the scale of punishment needed to get a dog to stop doing doggy things is tantamount to abuse.

#2 Different Dogs Need Different Tools

This one is a bit more logical as people relate it to the human equivalent. However, a dog's brain is much more primal and their ability to understand abstract ideas and attribute a morality to these behaviours differs vastly. While different dogs may differ in how quickly they learn, what they have to learn and overcome according to their inherent breed traits and their motivations, there is never a need to utilize pain or fear. Force-Free trainers spend a good deal of time in mentorships and workshops developing the skills and experience to eliminate their reliance on tools to modify and shape behaviour, but instead rely on an understanding of the dog in front of them, their education in learning theory and the empathy to make it as stress free as possible on the dog, which in turn makes the things they learn more salient and long lasting.

#3 It's better than having a dead dog

This is called a false equivalency. I often hear it in regards to extremely aggressive behaviour or recall (coming back when called). The theory is that there are some dogs you cannot trust not to run into the street or that behaviour suppression leads to long term fixes for aggression.

This is not only problematic from a logical perspective once you understand learning theory, but from an experiential one as well. I have had 20 of my own personal dogs (including some very “hard to train” breeds) and we estimate around 100 foster dogs and have never had to resort to aversive equipment for aggression or any other problematic behaviours. All my dogs have had an excellent recall as well.

Often, poorly educated trainers will pander to clients that want the immediate results that behaviour suppression give the appearance of. Quite often they are further incentivized by the money that “brush up” or “refresher” training they offer as well as the permanence of aversive training is severely lacking. They also do not inform their clients of the potential fall out behaviours that result or that there is no “quick fixes” as far as behaviour is concerned.

#4 It is a quick fix, easy button approach to training

Well, as you’ve probably learned by now, there is no such thing. The use of punishment in learning actually inhibits learning and is a temporary fix at best. This often leaves pet parents dependent on aversive tools to maintain the level of suppression needed to keep the unwanted behaviour at bay. In fact, removal of the aversive equipment can lead to very explosive and frightening results.

[-see the full story here.](#)

The truth is that

Every single animal welfare organization worldwide recommends against the use of aversive equipment and recommend the use of positive reinforcement to modify ALL behaviour. I really hate to say it, because often life has a horrifying way of proving me wrong, but I feel like 12 years in I have seen and experienced every kind of problematic behaviour one can as a trainer. An estimated 99% of aggression is fear or pain based. Now ask yourself how adding pain to fear or pain will make dogs less aggressive and you start to see the mental gymnastics that one must perform to use those tools.

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Saskatchewan SPCA - from the Animal Rescue Standards Guide which states

“Training methods must be based on positive reinforcement in accordance with current professional guidelines.

Under the UNACCEPTABLE heading - “The use of physical force as a punishment or in anger for behaviour modification.”

and the

SVMA - Saskatchewan Veterinary Medical Association

3.3.3. Training in the Code of Practice for Canadian Kennel Operations

“Reward-based methods used in humane training have resulted in positive long-term impacts of decreased aggression, attention-seeking, and fear. There is also evidence that these methods improve a dog’s ability to learn. Behaviour modification through classical conditioning and/or desensitization and counter-conditioning can be effective when performed below the threshold that would cause distress, anxiety, or fear in a dog.

Aversive training techniques are strongly discouraged. These methods may include confrontational and/or physical methods of training such as the use of force, rolling dogs, scruffing, growling, muzzling, jowling, shaking, or staring dogs down. Such techniques create fear and therefore may increase the likelihood of a fear-induced aggressive response. Similarly, the use of aversive devices such as choke, pinch, prong, or electronic collars is strongly discouraged in favour of more humane alternatives.”

More links

[American Veterinary Society of Animal Behaviour \(vet behaviourists\) Position Statement on Humane Training](#)

[Canadian Veterinary Association Position Statement on Humane Training](#)

[Association for Professional Dog Trainers International - Training Methodologies](#)

[Pet Professionals Guild - Position Statement on the Use of Shock in Training.](#)

[Pet Professionals Guild - The Use of Choke and Prong Collars in Training](#)

[The Welfare Consequences and Efficacy of Training Pet Dogs with Remote Electronic Training Collars in Comparison to Reward Based Training](#)

"E-collar training did not result in a substantially superior response to training in comparison to similarly experienced trainers who do not use e-collars to improve recall and control chasing behaviour. Accordingly, it seems that the routine use of e-collars even in accordance with best practice (as suggested by collar manufacturers) presents a risk to the well-being of pet dogs. The scale of this risk would be expected to be increased when practice falls outside of this ideal."

[Dog training methods: their use, effectiveness and interaction with behaviour and welfare](#)

"There are ethical concerns that dog training methods incorporating physical or verbal punishment may result in pain and/or suffering. We provide evidence that, in the general dog owning population, dogs trained using punishment are no more obedient than those trained by other means and, furthermore, they exhibit increased numbers of potentially problematic behaviours. Because reward based methods are associated with higher levels of obedience and fewer problematic behaviours, we suggest that their use is a more effective and welfare-compatible alternative to punishment for the average pet owner."