



ASSOCIATION OF PET DOG TRAINERS AUSTRALIA INC.

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APDT Position Statement on the Use of Shock and Prong Collars for Modifying the Behaviour of Dogs

Prong and shock collars work by applying an aversive stimulus to reduce behaviour – in learning theory this is known as positive punishment. Punishment based training can quickly escalate in intensity and frequency resulting in pain and unnecessary suffering to the animal.

In a study done by Hiby et al. it was found that the use of punishment when training dogs resulted in increased behavioural problems⁽¹⁾. A more recent study by Schilder et al. showed increased stress responses and suggested compromised welfare for working dogs trained using electronic shock⁽²⁾. The proponents of shock collars have suggested that Schilder's findings are not valid because "the researchers had no control over the intensity of the stimulation being used, the expertise of the trainers, and the range of behaviours targeted"⁽³⁾. However, would this not be exactly the case with average pet owners who lack the expert timing to ensure the dog associates the punishment with the undesired behaviour?

Shock and prong collars can easily become implements of abuse when unskilled, angry or frustrated individuals attempt to modify a dog's behaviour with their use. Yet they are promoted commercially on numerous websites as a safe, simple, quick and easy method of training and modifying the behaviour of dogs: A typical example from one site states "the shock collar is the most ideal system for first time dog owners and non-experienced trainer"⁽⁴⁾.

Furthermore, prong and/or shock collars do nothing to alleviate underlying anxiety that is the cause of many behaviour problems. For example if a dog is shocked for growling, the dog may simply learn to give no warning about biting (because it has learned these warnings are punished) and progress to biting with no warning signs. Equally distressing from a welfare perspective is the fact that inescapable punishment techniques can lead to a dog exhibiting a learned helplessness response where the dog becomes catatonic and ceases to respond to cues at all.

Sadly it is also a fact that such devices have been used to abuse children^(5,6) - a situation that is universally condemned because society accepts that using shock is unacceptable for the human animal. APDT suggest that shock is also unacceptable and unnecessary for the training of companion animals and in the hands of abusive individuals, provides a method of inflicting significant pain and suffering.

APDT believe there are significant risks involved in making shock and prong collars available to deal with problems that can be addressed by more humane methods. Use of prong collars or electronic shock collars is not in the best interest of dogs or the wider community. Further, with the many advances being made in behavioural medicine "The historic use of adversarial, coercive techniques no longer makes sense given what we know about dog cognition and learning"⁽⁷⁾.

APDT Australia Inc is committed to the promotion of training methods based on respect of the dog as a sentient and cognitive animal and that enhance the human/animal bond.

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