



FLORIDA VETERINARY BEHAVIOR SERVICE

EXPERT TREATMENT. COMPASSIONATE CARE.

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Why you should not use shock as a training tool

Shock collars, also known as electronic collars or e-collars, are commonly used in dog training today. Some shock collars are remote operated, while others (such as with underground fences) automatically generate shock when the dog reaches a certain distance away from the underground line. **Shock should never be used to train a dog regardless of the way that it is delivered.**

The scientific research overwhelmingly demonstrates that shock leads to or contributes to fear, pain, aggression, panic and stress when compared to positive reinforcement training. In fact, shock collars are considered inhumane and are illegal to use in many countries and regions including Scotland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Austria, Switzerland, Slovenia, Germany, Quebec, Wales and parts of Australia. Many organizations have published position statements advising against the use of electronic collars including European Society of Veterinary Clinical Ethology (ESVCE), American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior (AVSAB), Association of Pet Dog Trainers (APDT), Pet Professionals Guild (PPG), Humane Society of the United States, and the United Kingdom Kennel Club to name a few.

Read more below about what the published research has shown regarding the use of shock to train your dog.

- Dogs trained with shock...
 - release more cortisol (a stress hormone) than dogs trained with positive reinforcement.
 - are more likely to engage in aggressive behaviors than dogs trained with positive reinforcement.
 - often pair the pain of shock with the person or place where they are being trained causing them to avoid that person or the training location.

Common misconceptions and questions surrounding shock collars

- STATEMENT: Do you think that I should use a shock collar to train my dog?
- ANSWER: No. We don't recommend the use of shock collars. They have been extensively studied in dogs and have been found to increase signs of fear and anxiety, cause physiologic stress along the lines of a panic attack and can cause physical pain and injury. When shock

collars are used, the dog's emotional state is not taken into consideration; when you add physical harm to stress, anxiety or fear, you see an increase in those things. An obedient dog can still be stressed and fearful. Also, studies show that they are not more effective than positive reinforcement techniques. Why would we use something that isn't more effective and can hurt your dog?

- STATEMENT: The shock does not hurt the dog. I put it on myself and I am fine.
- ANSWER: Of course, the shock hurts or at minimum is very unpleasant! If it didn't, it wouldn't have any effect, plain and simple. If the shock did not elicit pain from the dog, it would not be punishing, and the behavior would not decrease. Keep in mind that the dog does not know when the shock is coming. If you used the collar on yourself, you knew when you would be shocked and could prepare. Also, it is likely that you kept the collar on the lowest setting which is not what dogs generally experience over the course of training. Finally, you were only shocked once presumably. Dogs are usually shocked more than once in training. They don't know when to expect a painful stimuli. No wonder shock creates fear and stress.

- STATEMENT: Once the dog understands the collar, you can just use the beep, which is harmless, right?
- ANSWER: Nope. While it is true that dogs who are trained using shock collars respond to the beep, the response is not a good one. The beeping sound still produces a strong stress response in the dog. In other words, even the collar set only to beep can make emotional disorders worse if the dog has experienced the beep as a predictor of shock.

- STATEMENT: Shock collars help the dog become more obedient.
- ANSWER: Actually, in head to head trials, dogs trained with shock were not more obedient than dogs trained with positive reinforcement. In addition, even those dogs who were trained by trainers experienced with shock collar use showed more signs of stress than those trained with positive reinforcement by experienced trainers.

- STATEMENT: Underground fences don't do as much harm as shock collars, right?
- ANSWER: Underground electric fences can do just as much harm as a pet parent activated shock collar. When dogs are sufficiently motivated to leave the property, they may do so whether they are shocked or not. Many times, dogs will choose to leave the property to access some exciting stimuli (to chase a cat for example), but once they are off-property, do not want to re-enter for risk of being shocked. Shock collars are not an effective way to keep any dog on property, especially one that has shown aggression to other animals or people. In fact, one study shows that dogs contained with electric fences are almost double as likely to escape as dogs contained with solid fences. Another study showed that dogs contained on electric fences were more likely to perpetrate severe bites when compared to dogs who were contained with more traditional fences.

- STATEMENT: Some dogs are so hardheaded, only shock collars are effective.

- ANSWER: This statement just doesn't hold up to the rigors of science. There is more behavioral research available on dogs today than ever before. There are many, many safe and effective methods for training dogs that do not involve the use of shock no matter the breed. Dog trainers who actively research and understand obedience training and behavior modification do not need to rely on shock collars to teach behaviors. If your trainer has recommended a shock collar for your dog, it is time to find a new trainer.
- STATEMENT: Shock collars are a last resort for an aggressive dog.
- ANSWER: Fortunately, this statement could not be more wrong. Studies show that shock collars can cause dogs who were previously unaggressive to become aggressive. Shock collars should never be used on any dog that has already shown aggressive behaviors, including growling, barking, and/or biting. There are many, many options for the treatment of dogs who show aggression and each year more and more come to use in clinical practice.