

IN THE D G HOUSE

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The Dangers of using Aversives!

We live in a world where gadgets and quick fixes rule but when it comes to dogs, a little more time and effort can go a long way!

Dog “training” businesses will try and get you to spend your hard earned money on the ultimate in training solutions like electric collars, spray collars and training discs but there are some trainers who will give you a cheaper solution like rattle bottles, water sprays and compressed air. Stop!!!

If it sounds too good to be true it probably is.

Dogs are individuals - some are very sensitive and others are hard as nails, however what one finds scary another might not bat an eyelid to and just because you have a 40kg Pitbull doesn't mean they have nerves of steel. In fact my Doberman and my Pitbull are probably the most sensitive of dogs I have owned, but my Labradoodle and Miniature Sausage-Dog are very thick-skinned!

It's very difficult to distinguish what one dog will find aversive over another.

The definition of punishment is something that stops the behaviour from happening again in the future.

Let's take jumping up as a behaviour we want to stop!

Dog jumps up, you knee him in the chest, he falls down and one of several things happen- either he stops jumping up because you caused enough pain for him to fear you, or he keeps jumping up because he thinks you are play fighting with him.

The first is going to have an effect on your relationship, and who in their right mind wants to hurt their dog?

The second is going to increase jumping up because it's now a fun game.

Another possibility is that you are somewhere in the middle, kneeing with enough force to hurt, but not enough to stop the behaviour.

If he is still jumping and you are still kneeing then this is NOT punishment (because he is still doing it), it's just abuse!

The one big flaw in this type of training is at no point have you told the dog what you actually want him to do! Are we expecting him to guess his way through a world he doesn't understand? It can be hard but try and get into the habit of reinforcing the behaviours we like instead of waiting for the dog to screw up and punishing him. There is an old dog training saying “Give the dog a job and he won't go self employed”. A job doesn't have to be any more than sit to greet people.



OK for some people reading this the thought of possibly scaring the dog into a quick fix can still be tempting but here is the really scary part

Making Negative Associations

Let's say your dog, Fluffy, escapes the garden so we surround the property with an electric fence. These fences are buried in the ground so the dog doesn't have a physical barrier to let him know when the electric shock will be delivered to his throat but some of them have a warning beep.

This beep has to be learnt via trial and error.

Your dog approaches the boundary, he hears the beep and then is zapped through the neck. He will probably need several shocks to be able to distinguish where the boundary is for the entire perimeter of the property.

What stops the dog learning that actually the garden is a scary place, and no longer wants to go out there to do his business, and on the day you can't walk him because he has a poorly leg, he starts to soil the house.

"Rub his nose in it, that'll sort it out" comes from the pub expert and your poor dog is now left with more very strange and scary behaviour from the confrontational human. This is one of the possible fall outs from unscientific punishment but let us say things are a little more extreme.

You have fitted your dog with his collar because the neighbours have already warned you that if Fluffy runs out to their garden while the kids are playing they will take action, although the kids couldn't care less. The first time he goes out he hears the children across the road playing, so he goes out to join in the fun. He gets to the edge and WHAM a shock straight to the throat! (Sorry "stimulation" is the preferred term of the company that sells them). Instantly he makes an association with kids and pain. One of the kids comes over to see if the yelping dog is ok and is warned off with a growl. A couple of days later little Dave kicks his ball into the garden and strolls over to collect it. Fluffy now backs off and little Dave wants to know why he is growling at him. "Don't be scared Fluffy" He reaches out and is bitten straight through the hand.

Thinking you're doing the "right" thing Fluffy is taken to the vets and never makes the trip home.

If you are being told by your instructor to use rattle cans, shock collars, water sprays, spray collars or any kind of aversive then change your trainer.

"Punishment is like a nuclear bomb – If the blast doesn't get you, the fall out will"
~ Steve White