

## Veterinary Behavior Group Discourages Punishment

**The American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior reissues its position on punishment-based dog training techniques.**

Citing the popularity of dominance-based dog training shows such as the “Dog Whisperer” and a resurgence of punishment-based dog training techniques, the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior (AVSAB) has reissued its position on using punishment only with great care and under specific circumstances.

According to the position statement, punishment is defined as “anything that decreases the likelihood a behavior will occur again,” and reinforcement is defined as anything that increases the likelihood of a behavior occurring again.

While certain punishment methods (i.e., choke chains, pinch collars, and electronic collars) can be effective in specific contexts, they can be associated with many adverse effects and consequently should be used with extreme care, according to the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior’s “Position Statement and Guidelines on the Use of Punishment for Dealing with Behavior Problems in Animals.”

“A major problem with using punishment is that it suppresses behavior temporarily but does not necessarily modify the underlying cause of the behavior,” said John Ciribassi, DVM, Dipl. ACVB, president of AVSAB. “As a result, it may make animals worse in the long run. For example, a fear-aggressive dog may become more fearful of people making future aggression more likely.”

Punishment may also interfere with the bond that exists between the owner and dog.

“We can have a problem with the pet not trusting the owner because it is unable to consistently anticipate what the owner is going to do in any given situation,” he said. “This occurs because people tend to punish inconsistently and because punishment is often a consequence of the owner’s anger, which leads to its use well after the bad behavior has occurred and in an overly intense level over a prolonged period.”

AVSAB recommends that training should focus on reinforcing desired behaviors, addressing the emotional state and environmental conditions driving the undesirable behavior.

For example, if a dog greets by jumping, they remove their attention (negative punishment) when the dog jumps, and when the dog sits or stands calmly, they reward the dog (positive reinforcement).

“Punishment should only be used when the above approach has failed despite an adequate effort as part of a larger training or behavior modification program that incorporates reinforcement of appropriate behaviors and works to change the underlying cause of the problem behavior,” according to the position statement.

For the full position statement and guidelines, visit [www.avsabonline.org](http://www.avsabonline.org).