

Helping Owners Avoid Behavior Problems in Pets

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In the Literature

Todd Z. Barriers to the adoption of humane dog training methods. *J Vet Behav.* 2018;25:28-34.

FROM THE PAGE ...

This article discusses the issues that may keep pet owners from adopting humane dog training methods. Humane dog training embraces the concept that only positive reinforcement and negative punishment techniques (ie, reward-based training) should be used. Other techniques such as positive punishment (ie, punishing an animal after a behavior has occurred in an attempt to discourage that particular behavior), use of aversive equipment (eg, choke or electric shock collars), and physical reprimands can be detrimental to efficient learning and have welfare implications on the dogs receiving them.¹ The training method used has been significantly associated with the degree of attention-seeking behavior, fear-related behavior, and aggression; these behaviors have been shown to be highest in dogs trained with positive punishment.²

The information available to pet owners and owner unfamiliarity with terminology often leads them to inappropriate resources. Some owners are influenced by television celebrity trainers that highlight use of aversive methods. Lack of regulation in dog training adds to this problem; trainers may advertise their use of positive reinforcement and humane methods when, in reality, the techniques being used do not fit with the standard definitions of these methods. In addition, there can be disparity among training term definitions (eg, positive punishment).

Some professional organizations, including the UK Association of Pet Dog Trainers and the Pet Professional Guild, forbid their members from using certain aversive techniques. The International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants and Association of Pet

Dog Trainers have adopted the least intrusive, minimally aversive approach. The American Veterinary Society for Animal Behavior has several position statements for the public, including use of punishment and dominance theory in behavior modification of animals.

Although veterinarians are in a position to counsel owners on these issues, not all veterinary colleges offer courses in veterinary behavior. Thus, veterinarians should educate themselves and research the credentials of trainers in their area.

... TO YOUR PATIENTS

Key pearls to put into practice:

- 1** Veterinarians can help owners understand the benefits and risks of certain training techniques and that positive reinforcement is the most efficient and humane way to train.
- 2** Owners should be informed of differences between trainers and the lack of reputable information on training and education of many individuals.
- 3** For cases in which behavior problems are affecting the human-animal bond or putting humans or other animals at risk, clinicians should consider referring to a board-certified veterinary behaviorist or certified applied animal behaviorist.

References

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2. Blackwell EJ, Twells C, Seawright A, Casey RA. The relationship between training methods and the occurrence of behavior problems, as reported by owners, in a population of domestic dogs. *J Vet Behav.* 2008;3(5):207-217.