



Statement on Sensationalist Animal “Training” on Television

Television networks and streaming entertainment outlets continue to produce sensationalist animal training shows that are not true representations of the unhurried and careful approach that good animal training mandates. These shows feature largely self-taught individuals with no demonstrable knowledge or skill in the art and science of animal training and who employ outdated methods and dangerous concepts, including excessive punishment, dominance-based methods, behavioral flooding, and setting up the animal to engage in an undesired behavior in order to “teach them a lesson.” These types of shows highlight approaches that cause significant harm to our animal companions and the human-animal bond. Forcing an animal to encounter something it fears without escape, or behavioral flooding, is cruel and inhumane. Physically punishing an animal and using tools like shock collars, scat mats, prong collars, collar corrections, spray bottles, or physical hitting is not acceptable because of the pain and discomfort it causes and the potential for making behavioral problems worse. This puts the animals at higher risk for surrender to shelters. Film crews highlight the temporary suppression of behavioral responses which create the illusion that the animal is “rehabilitated” or “calm and submissive.” The reality is that after they turn off the cameras, the fear, anxiety, or aggression will often resurface and may be increased.

We know a better way. Peer-reviewed literature continues to demonstrate that the use of positive reinforcement is the most humane and effective approach (see a short list of references below). Knowledgeable trainers, who do not set animals up to fail, identify an appropriate alternative behavior, train the behavior using positive reinforcement, and then teach the animal to offer that wanted behavior instead of the unwanted behavior. Skilled trainers do not force an animal to “face its fears.” Skilled trainers know how to employ humane techniques, such as systematic desensitization and/or counterconditioning to gradually help an animal feel more comfortable with things they fear without evoking that fear response. Networks may not find it engaging, yet it is solid and beneficial training, and it is effective.

We are not alone in this position. Leading animal training, animal welfare, and veterinary organizations promote the use of positive reinforcement-based training. Animals are successfully trained for general companionship, but also for police, military, and service work using positive reinforcement. In fact, the use of positive reinforcement has been shown to improve working dog performance. Respected national and international animal training certifying bodies require certifiants and members to adhere to the Least Intrusive, Minimally Aversive (LIMA) ethical standard, which states, “LIMA does not justify the use of punishment in lieu of other effective interventions and strategies. LIMA requires trainers and consultants to work to increase the use of positive reinforcement and eliminate the use of punishment.” (IAABC, 2020). LIMA-based trainers are not only skilled, but educated as they are required to continue the study of the art and science of animal behavior in order to maintain certifications.

What can show producers do instead? There are several shows that demonstrate positive reinforcement to solve animal behavior problems: Victoria Stillwell’s *It’s Me or the Dog*, Jackson Galaxy’s *My Cat from Hell*, *Nightmare Pets SOS* on BBC with Chirag Patel and *Cats and Dogs at War* with Chirag Patel are excellent examples. All of these show the use of positive reinforcement to solve behavior problems without the fallout and dangers of using outdated methods. There are also YouTube channels on which to model content, including KikoPup with Emily Larlham, who is the world record holder for the most dog tricks performed in one minute.

We invite television and streaming outlet producers to consider the significant and negative impact of prioritizing entertainment over animal welfare on animals across the globe.

Consumers can find valuable information about positive reinforcement training on our website, [humanedogtrainingadvocates.org](http://www.humanedogtrainingadvocates.org). Find a positive reinforcement trainer near you by visiting any of the following websites: the Association of Professional Dog Trainers website: apdt.com; on the International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants website: iaabc.org; on the Certification Council for Pet Dog Trainers website: CCPDT.org; the Karen Pryor Academy for Animal Training website: clickertraining.com; Victoria Stillwell’s Academy for Dog Training and Behavior’s website: vsdogtrainingacademy.com; and The Academy for Dog Trainers’ website: academyfordogtrainers.com.

Visit our website at <http://www.humanedogtrainingadvocates.org> for more real facts about animal training and behavior!



Primary Author

Mara Velez, Executive Director and Co-founder of the Humane Dog Training Advocates

Acknowledgements

- The San Francisco SPCA for the inspiration for this statement which was first based on copy written by the SFSPCA team
- Marissa Martino of Paws and Reward and the Shelter Playgroup Alliance for co-authoring the first significant round of edits to the statement
- The Humane Dog Training Advocates Board of Directors, Anne Baranski, Marieka Schrader, Lynn Webb and Anna Wong for significant edits and direction

References

1. Beerda, B., Schilder, M., van Hooff, J., de Vriesa, H., & Mola, J. (1998, July). Behavioral, saliva cortisol, and heart rate responses to different types of stimuli in dogs. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science* (58) 365–381.
2. Blackwell, E., & Casey, R. (2006). *The use of shock collars and their impact on the welfare of dogs.* University of Bristol.
3. Blackwell, E., et. al. (2008). The relationship between training methods and the occurrence of behavior problems, as reported by owners, in a population of domestic dogs. *Journal of Veterinary Behavior*, Volume 3(5), 207–217.
4. Blackwell, E. et. al (2012). The use of electronic collars for training domestic dogs: estimated prevalence, reasons and risk factors for use, and owner perceived success as compared to other training methods. *BMC Veterinary Research*, Volume 8(93).
5. British Small Animal Veterinary Association. (2012). Position Statement on Aversive Training Methods (Electronic and Other Aversive Collars). Position Statement No. 31.
6. Deldalle, et al (2013). Effects of two training methods on stress-related behaviors of the dog (*Canis familiaris*) and on the dog–owner relationship. *Journal of Veterinary Behavior*, Volume 9(2), 58-65.
7. Friedman, S. (2010, March). What's Wrong with This Picture? Effectiveness Is Not Enough. *APDT Journal*.
8. Haverbecke, et. al. (2007). Training methods of military dog handlers and their effects on the team's performances. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, 113, 110–122.
9. Herron, (2009). Survey of the use and outcome of confrontational and non-confrontational training methods in client-owned dogs showing undesired behaviors. *Applied Animal Behavior Science*, Volume 117 (1-2), 47–54.
10. Hiby, E.F. Rooney, N.J., & Bradshaw, J.W.S. (2004, February). Dog training methods: their use, effectiveness and interaction with behaviour and welfare. *Animal Welfare* (13) 1 63-69(7).
11. Hibley, et. al. (2004). Training methods and owner–dog interactions: Links with dog behaviour and learning ability. *Applied Animal Behavior Science*, Volume 132 (3-4), 169–177.
12. International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants (IAABC). 2020. IAABC Statement on LIMA. <https://m.iaabc.org/about/lima/>. Retrieved February 25, 2021.
13. Polsky, R. (2010). Can Aggression in Dogs Be Elicited Through the Use of Electronic Pet Containment Systems? *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science* (3) 4 345-357
14. Polsky, R. (1983) Factors influencing aggressive behaviour in dogs. *California Veterinarian*, 10.
15. Rooney, et al. (2011). Dog training methods: Their use, effectiveness and interaction with behaviour and welfare. *Animal Welfare*, 13:63-69.
16. Schalke, E., Stichnoth, J., Ott, S., & Jones-Baade, R. (2007, July). Clinical signs caused by the use of electric training collars on dogs in everyday life situations. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science* (105) 4 369–380.
17. Schalke, E., Stichnoth, J. and Jones-Baade, R. (2005) Stress symptoms caused by the use of electric training collars on dogs (*Canis Familiaris*) in everyday life situations. *Current Issues and Research in Veterinary Behavioural Medicine: Papers presented at the 5th International Veterinary Behaviour meeting.* Purdue University Press, West Lafayette, Indiana.
18. Schilder, M., & van der Borg, J. (2004). Training dogs with help of the shock collar: short and long term behavioural effects. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science* (85) 319–334.
19. Solomon R., Kamin, L. and Wynne, C. (1953) Traumatic avoidance learning: The outcomes of several extinction procedures with dogs. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 48 (2), 291-302.
20. Ziv, G. (2017). The Effects of Using Aversive Training Methods in Dogs – A Review. *Journal of Veterinary Behavior: Clinical Applications and Research* (0) 0.