

## **ABOUT PUNISHMENT (AVERSIVES) IN TRAINING**

**PUNISHMENT MUST BE DO-ABLE BY THE OWNER** Few owners have the ability or desire to select and administer punishment effectively.

### **PUNISHMENT ONLY SUPPRESSES BEHAVIOR**

Owners hope that punishment will stop a behavior. There is evidence to believe that adding an aversive after an unwanted behavior may just “stun” a behavior temporarily.

### **PUNISHMENT IS INAPPROPRIATE FOR FEAR OR ANGER**

Angry or fearful dogs can be made worse. Harsh correction (punishment) can easily frustrate the dog and escalate the dog’s aggression or fear.

### **INEFFECTIVE ATTEMPTS AT PUNISHMENT CAN BE A REWARD**

Your dog is in the backyard, barking. You open the door and say “Bad Dog! No! Regardless of the shouting, he may have gotten a reward: He saw your face, he heard your voice... you are paying attention to him. Barking can become an "Owner Interact with me cue!

### **PUNISHMENT IS AN INCOMPLETE PROGRAM**

Punishment only teaches the dog what not to do. The dog might stop the punished behavior, but begin doing something else wrong. An example is that the dog leaps about and mugs visitors at the door. Mugging is bad, but what do you WANT the dog to do? Sit is good because it is incompatible with jumping. Now you can reward at times when you would be punishing. Doorbell rings, it’s the dog’s cue to sit quietly on a mat within sight of the door. When the guest is seated and things calm down, the dog can earn the further reward of being released to visit the guest.

### **PUNISHMENT MIGHT DAMAGE YOUR RELATIONSHIP**

Punishment often causes confusion and reduces the trust that is so important between you and your dog. It’s best to earn your dog’s respect by consistency in leadership and good training, not to demand it through intimidation, force, or physical abuse.

### **PUNISHMENT NEEDS TO BE CONSISTENT**

Punishment should be administered at the first sign of the unwanted behavior and every single time that behavior occurs thereafter. If you miss some of the behaviors and do not punish them, your dog will learn to take his chances and play the lottery.

### **PUNISHMENT MIGHT NOT GENERALIZE**

If your dog is sniffing while you’ve asked him to heel on leash and you jerk the lead, you are hoping the dog will understand that he shouldn’t sniff while in formal heel position. Even if it works as a communication of “no sniff” - and it’s always questionable just what the dog is learning - he might interpret it as he shouldn’t sniff in that location. It’s okay to sniff further along. Or he might learn that he shouldn’t sniff on concrete, but sniffing on grass is okay.

### **PUNISHMENT NEEDS TO WORK THE FIRST TIME APPLIED**

Actions are not having the proper effect if they need to be repeated more than once or twice. After that, punishment constitutes abuse.

### **GOOD TIMING FOR CORRECT CONCLUSION**

The aversive should be delivered within two seconds for it to be associated with the specific behavior. We do not live in a sterile environment. Many things are happening at once in real life. The dog might not make the association you had in mind. "Was I bad for chasing the squirrel?" "Are you angry because I did not catch the squirrel?" "Should I not like the child who was standing there as I was being punished for chasing the squirrel?"

### **PUNISHMENT CAN LEAD TO THE LEARNED HELPLESSNESS SYNDROME**

The dog shuts down. She decides that nothing she can do is good and so she does nothing, she just takes the punishment. The dog doesn't learn, she just endures punishment.

### **PUNISHMENT AND THE SUBSTITUTION SYNDROME**

Repetitive actions, such as barking, digging, chewing, and licking calm a dog, much like rocking a baby settles the child. You might be able to interrupt or temporarily stop them, but the dog might engage in a substitute behavior even more annoying or dangerous. If you stop a dog from barking, he may begin digging holes, chewing the furniture, or licking his paw until it's sore. The calming effect of these repetitive behaviors is a natural reward for the dog.

### **PUNISHMENT NEEDS TO BE AS SEVERE AS NECESSARY**

The punishment should be aversive and intense enough to stop the behavior right away. The FIRST TIME! If not, you will end up escalating the punishment until it is much stronger and harsher than if you had started with the appropriate level in the beginning.

### **DOG CAN THINK PUNISHMENT IS CONTINGENT ON OWNER'S PRESENCE**

The dog should experience the aversive as independent of the owner's presence; or else you will only get results if the owner is present.

### **PUNISHMENT SHOULD BE TO CHANGE THE DOG'S BEHAVIOR**

The goal of an aversive is to quickly and permanently change the unwanted behavior, not to let the owner feel better because he's "punished" the dog.

### **There are Humane and Effective Alternatives**

For the purposes of this handout, the words punishment and aversive mean "adding something the dog considers yucky or nasty" with the intent of stopping the behavior. No attempt is made at categorizing the examples into formal learning theory:

The information contained in this handout is supported by facts and research by M. and K. Breland, R. Bailey, B.F. Skinner, K. Pryor, M. Sidman, M. Burch, B. Schwartz and others.