



Shock Collars

Shock collars have been in use for many years to train dogs (and occasionally cats). They deliver an electrical shock that varies in intensity in order to stop unwanted behavior. Invisible fences are one type, another are “bark collars” that deliver the shock when the dog barks, and others are triggered by a remote control device where you push a button when your pet is doing something you don’t like.

People will ask us about shock collars and we always say, “NO!” It’s hard to find a good reason to use shock collars today when we know of much more humane ways to train pets.

Shock collars use negative reinforcement which is providing an undesirable consequence (in this case pain) to prevent unwanted behavior. It is the exact opposite of what veterinary behaviorists advise these days.

You can train pets better with positive reinforcement by rewarding the appropriate behavior. This may take more effort on your part and requires an understanding of normal pet behavior and their body language. However, the result is a well-trained pet that hasn’t become anxious or stressed.

A study done at the University of Lincoln in the UK showed that overall shock collars actually prove a less effective training tool than positive reinforcement. The study demonstrated that the shock caused distress in dogs. It also showed that dogs trained with shock collar methods were generally tenser and nervous, less engaged in environmental interaction, and more prone to yawning (a sign of anxiety and stress) in comparison to control dogs not trained with shock collars.

If you’ve ever gotten shocked by an electrical outlet at home, you know it is not a pleasant experience. Imagine if it happens “out of the blue” and you don’t understand why or when the intensity is much greater. You create fear in your pet that can have serious consequences.



A shock collar to prevent barking may cause shocks repeatedly or go off when another dog is barking. There is also the danger of the shock being too intense. We have seen burns on a dog’s neck from a shock collar more than once.

There are so many cons against using shock collars and we can’t think of any pros. If your pet has behavior problems consult with a veterinary behaviorist on ways to improve the situation. For information on training with positive reinforcement, we recommend the website of Dr. Sophia Yin. Karen Pryor also has some good information on clicker training.

