



RSPCA School for Dogs Information Sheet

Barking Collars

RSPCA Queensland gets many enquiries regarding the use of collars and other devices for dealing with barking dogs. As the State's premier animal welfare organisation, we are opposed to the use of any devices that cause discomfort, pain or suffering to our dogs. We use only positive training methods that align with the RSPCA Five Freedoms for Animals, as below.

The Five Freedoms:

1. Freedom from Hunger and Thirst
2. Freedom from Discomfort
3. Freedom from Pain, Injury or Disease
4. Freedom to Express Normal Behaviour
5. Freedom from Fear and Distress



Types of barking collars

Static electronic collars - the dog wears a collar that gives the dog an electric shock which is triggered when the dog barks.

Citronella collars - a citronella spray is aimed at the dog when the dog barks.

Ultrasonic barking collars and units - emit a high pitched ultrasonic sound (out of a humans hearing range) when the dog barks. This system is also made as an outdoor unit.

All these collars can cause discomfort, pain, fear, distress and in some cases, injury to the animal.

Dangers

Wrong association

There are inherent dangers in the use of punishment with dogs, mainly that we run the risk of the dog making the wrong (unintended) association between the cause (behaviour or event) and effect (punishment). For example, if a shock collar is used to deter a dog from barking at people walking past the front of the house, they may make the association that whenever they see a person walking past, they get hurt. Thus, they may not like a person coming to the gate anymore. This can lead to the dog developing distrust or even a fear of people. This fear may extend to all visitors to your home (including children), and possibly result in the dog becoming aggressive to people.

Dogs with citronella collars can often learn to bark until the spray runs out. Not only that, the dog has the smell on its skin and fur at all times, so is not learning to associate the cause and the effect.

Increased stress

Another risk is that the dog may not be able to link the shock to anything at all. The dog can repeatedly suffer the pain of a shock for no apparent reason and can lead to the dog becoming



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completely confused, anxious and stressed. Some collars may also be triggered by extraneous noise in the environment, so the dog never learns to make an association between the shock and the barking. This is often the case with ultrasonic barking collars. The sound can increase stress levels in dogs so they are no longer able to understand what the sound means.

Pain and injury

The RSPCA have also seen cases of barking collars malfunctioning causing severe burn marks on dogs.

Studies by Schilder and van der Borg (2003) concluded that shocks received during training were “not only unpleasant, but also painful and frightening”. They also found that it may influence the dog’s long term wellbeing in a negative way.

Training - the way forward

We also do not recommend any collar that involves an aversive method because we do not believe them to be the most successful way to manage problem behaviours.

Barking collars do nothing to let our dogs know what we would like them to do. Our dogs aren’t being intentionally “naughty” or “bad,” they are simply unaware that barking all day is not what we desire. We need to teach dogs the behaviours we want them to show and that these behaviours can be more rewarding than barking is. For example, lying quietly on a bed may not be very rewarding on its own, but lying quietly on a bed chewing on a bone is very rewarding. Many dogs will cease nuisance barking when they are provided with a positive outlet for their energy (e.g. treat balls, bones or Kong toys), their physical and mental requirements are met, and when they are in an environment where they are able to relax (e.g. a crate or den area).

In order to successfully manage problem behaviours, it is essential to establish when and why the dog is engaging in the unwanted behaviour, such as barking. Barking always has a reason.

Understanding the reason for the behaviour may involve keeping a diary or record, and getting information from your neighbours. It may involve some time, reading and learning, and getting help from your vet or a qualified dog trainer. For more information, ask for our information sheets on Barking, Crating for Management, Denning, Entertaining Your Dog, Kongs and Nothing in Life is Free, Separation anxiety and Home Alone.

Unless the underlying motivations for the behaviour are addressed, managing barking or any other problem with punishment will not be successful. In addition, the welfare of the dog will suffer.

Research into the long term effectiveness of punishment in the form of electric shock treatment in the Journal of Veterinary Behaviour (Overall, 2007) found that:

- Shock is not treatment for pets with behavioural concerns
- Shock is not a way forward
- Shock does not bring dogs back from euthanasia, instead it may send them there
- There are many negative consequences that are dismissed by those promoting the techniques



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The Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors (APBC) feels that the use of devices that rely on pain or discomfort to modify behaviour are inappropriate and dangerous as they have the potential to seriously compromise the welfare of dogs and ruin the relationship with their owners.

References

American Veterinary Society of Animal Behaviour (2007)

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Schilder, Matthijs B.H and van der Borg, Joanne A.M (2004), Training dogs with the use of the shock collar: short and long term behavioural effects, Applied Animal Behaviour Science 85, 319-335

Australian Veterinary Association (2014), Use of behaviour modifying collars on Dogs,

<https://www.ava.com.au/policy/613-use-behaviour-modifying-collars-dogs>

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