



RSPCA School for Dogs Information Sheet

Punishment

Dogs only make associations with things that have immediate consequences for them. As such, when using punishment, you must catch them in the act. This however, can still be ineffective as there are often many variables in a situation, such as the location or the people or other dogs they are with, which can make it difficult for the dog to understand what it is being punished for.

It is also possible for the dog to perceive what we consider to be a punishment, such as a stern voice or pushing away, as rewarding just because it is attention. For example, you get home from work, your dog jumps on you and you push it away and say 'no', while you may not think you are rewarding her, she has just spent the day alone and is keen to interact with you so may continue to do so for this extra attention.

Even if your dog does consider you punishing it as being negative, they do not generalise well so will not necessarily stop doing the behaviour in every variation of the situation. For example, if your dog gets in trouble for jumping up on you he may not realise that you meant it couldn't jump on any person, and happily jump on your children and all your visitors.

If we use punishment there is a risk is that the dog will may make an association that we didn't intend, could not predict and cannot control. For example if your dog jumps up on you when you get home and you yell and stamp your feet, she may make the association that you coming home from work is something to be concerned about; and so start avoiding you, or running away. In time this may develop into concern about where you are going in the morning and what will happen when you return. You end up with a stressed dog, who thinks its humans are very unstable.

Forms of Punishment

- A check chain
- A smack
- A raised voice
- Aggressive gestures
- Removal of adequate food or water
- Removal or deprivation of adequate interaction/attention

All of these contradict what the RSPCA stands for:

Freedom from Pain, Injury and Disease,

Freedom from Discomfort,

Freedom from Fear and Distress

Freedom from Hunger and Thirst

Freedom to express normal behaviour

Dogs that regularly receive punishment have elevated stress and distress responses, most marked when the person associated with the punishment was present. As well as contravening the five



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freedoms, it can also lead to a weaker immune system making to dog prone to illness and reduce its capacity to recover.

If you punish your dog physically you run the risk it will bite you in an attempt to defend itself, in retaliation or in pre-emption of you punishing it again.

So what is the Alternative?

Dogs can learn about the appropriate behaviour if we show them when and how to do it. As responsible owners, benevolent leaders, and provider of all things in the dogs life we are in an ideal position to do this. Prevention is always much easier than a cure so by simply teaching the dog what is expected in each situation helps to reduce that stress.

We can provide clear direction as to what the dog should do in each situation by ignoring inappropriate behaviour and redirecting it to a desirable behaviour. Compare the Jumping dog in the following cases; which is less stressful for you and your dog?

Scenario 1	Scenario 2
<p>You come home Your dog jumps on you, You push the dog down and yell “no” The dog cowers (because this is what he has learned will get more attention from you).</p>	<p>You come home and your dog jumps at you You turn away without giving any attention You ask your dog to sit, You reward him and tell him he is a ‘good dog’. The dog fetches his ball for you to throw (because that is what he has learned from you).</p>
<p>The next morning you go out Your dog jumps on you You push the dog down and yell “no” The dog cowers.....</p>	<p>The next morning you go out Your dog jumps at you You turn away without giving any attention You ask your dog to sit, You reward him and tell him he is a ‘good dog’. The dog goes and gets a toy for you to play with him</p>
<p>The next time you go out Your dog jumps on you You push the dog down and yell “no” The dog cowers.....</p>	<p>In the afternoon you go out Your dog comes running to you You ask your dog to sit, You reward him and tell him he is a ‘good dog’. The dog goes happily to his bed</p>
<p>The dog does not know what is expected</p>	<p>Your dog is learning what is expected.</p>

Training Classes

Finding a training class that uses positive reinforcement techniques, such as those offered by the Animal Training and Behaviour Centre, will help to give you great ideas and tips about how to deal with each scenario where you have used punishment previously.

If you would like any further information on using positive reinforcement please contact us.



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Further reading:

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

<https://www.ava.com.au/public/about-pets/polite-pets-month/resources/debunking-dominance-dogs>

https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/6d6b2d_6b11a8636b4c4e9c9744774811471f7a.pdf

<https://eileenanddogs.com/fallout-aversives-punishment-negative-reinforcement/>

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