



# Pet Behavior Counseling

*Helping you and your pet become best friends for life.*

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## **NO SHOCK COLLARS! – TRAIN WITH YOUR BRAIN, NOT PAIN!**

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**Green Acres opposes the use of shock collars because they; 1) cause pain and stress, 2) they can cause aggression and 3) because there are ample humane alternatives to training and containment. The use of shock amounts to abuse.**

We first warned you of the danger of shock collars in our May 2004 *Paw Prints*. Since writing that article, we have obtained studies and information further supporting Green Acres position on this serious matter. Additionally, many canine behavior professionals have reached the same conclusions about the problems caused by the use of shock collars. Sadly, due to the continued popularity of electronic underground fence systems and the use of shock collars in training, we felt the need to address this topic again.

### **What Is A Shock Collar?**

A shock collar consists of a buckle collar worn around the dog's neck. Attached to the collar is a small box with two metal electrodes. The collar is fit tightly on the dog so the electrodes penetrate the dog's fur and press snugly against their skin. When activated, there is a potential of 1500 volts to 4500 volts across the electrodes, which delivers a painful electrical shock to the dog<sup>1</sup>. Some collars may even operate at higher voltages. Unfortunately, it is impossible to confirm voltages because manufacturers are very secretive about the amount of voltage their systems apply.

There are three types of shock collars in current use; 1) remote collars, 2) anti-bark collars, and 3) underground fence containment collars. The manner in which the collars are activated varies with the type of collar.

Remote training collars utilize a transmitting unit, held by the person. By pressing a button on the transmitter, they can shock the dog whenever they wish. The shock is used as a form of positive punishment (the dog is shocked when it does something the

person does not want) or negative reinforcement (the dog is shocked continuously until it exhibits a desirable behavior). These collars are often used by those who hunt or compete in field trials so that their owners can earn trophies and ribbons. There is even a group of dog trainers that advocate their use for training typical pet dog behaviors such as sit and stay. There are humane and more effective ways to train these behaviors as well as to train dogs for hunting and trials.

Anti-bark shock collars work by detecting when the dog barks and then administering an electric shock as a form of punishment, hopefully stopping the dog from barking. Barking is a very normal and very complex behavior for a dog, meaning that there are many possible reasons a dog barks. One of the most frequent reasons a dog barks is due to anxiety. If a stressed dog suddenly receives a painful shock on its neck it is much more likely to become even more stressed and increase its vocalizing, thus receiving more shocks. These collars cannot distinguish why a dog is barking so just keep shocking away.

Underground fence containment systems administer a shock to the dog when they cross a visible or invisible line in the yard. In theory, they serve as an alternative to a real fence. However, they do not keep animals or people out of your yard and your dog will not only receive a shock for leaving, but will also receive a shock for coming home. I have personally witnessed dogs with burns on their necks due to the use of these collars and have observed dogs that have become aggressive and have bitten because of these systems.

## What Are the Problems with Shock Collars?

There is no doubt that shock collars cause pain. While proponents might call it a “stim” or a “tap,” we know from the science of operant conditioning that the aversive stimulus (shock) must be sufficiently aversive (i.e. painful) in order to work. Folks, let’s call them what they are: shock collars are nothing less than devices used to hurt your dog from a distance. Fortunately, standards and laws prohibit physical abuse such as kicking or hitting an animal, so why should abuse by remote control be acceptable? We don’t think it is.

Two studies<sup>2,3</sup> have reported that shock collars definitely cause undue stress on a dog. A study of guard dogs<sup>2</sup>, specifically bred for toughness and low sensitivity to pain and stress, found that training with shock collars caused long lasting stress effects to the point that the dog continued to associate their handler as aversive even outside of a training context. **The dogs exhibited behaviors clearly associated with fear and anxiety long after they had received shocks.**

Another study<sup>3</sup> examined the use of shock for training to stop undesirable hunting/chasing behavior. This study also revealed the dogs found being trained with shock to be very stressful. The authors concluded “...**the general use of electric shock collars is not consistent with animal welfare.**”

As a behavior counselor, I have worked with clients whose dogs became aggressive after they began using a shock collar containment system. I know of many other trainers

who have done the same.

## **How Does A Shock Collar Cause Aggression?**

The use of positive punishment in the form of choke collars, prong collars and shock collars can cause aggression. This occurs because the anxiety and pain the dog feels when shocked is often associated with whatever the dog was focusing on at that instant rather than their own behavior. Both real life cases described below illustrate how using a shock collar created aggression in previously friendly dogs. These people sought me out for advice, after the aggression problem had developed.

### **Case #1**

A happy, gregarious dog, whom I will call "Jake", bounded off to greet every person he saw. Jake's guardians were concerned about him leaving the yard because he frequently went to visit the neighbor. For what they believed was his protection, the family installed an underground fence system that would shock Jake before he was outside of his yard. They trained him to the system per the manufacturer's instructions.

A few weeks after the system was installed, Jake saw the neighbor out in her yard. Since Jake had always liked his neighbor he ran straight for her, focused on his human friend when ZAP! he felt a sharp stinging pain around his neck. This happened a few more times, the once friendly Jake always getting shocked as he ran towards someone he thought was his friend. Then one day Jake was inside when the neighbor knocked on the front door. When the family opened the door, Jake saw the neighbor and immediately reacted by biting her in the leg, before she could cause him pain.

To Jake the neighbor was the predictor of the shock, and he took action in an attempt to prevent being shocked. This incident could have been prevented with the installation of a good, old fashioned fence or by providing Jake with supervision when he was out in the yard.

### **Case #2**

A young dog that we will call Jenny, would drag her guardians around on leash, especially when she saw another dog. Jenny was just curious and friendly and wanted to greet the other dogs, but her guardians were older and Jenny was a strong dog. They had made no attempts to train Jenny, and were frustrated with being pulled all over anytime Jenny saw one of her own kind. They went to a pet store where it was suggested they purchase a remote shock collar. They were instructed to shock Jenny whenever she pulled on her leash.

On their next walk, Jenny, as she always had done, lunged forward in friendly greeting when she spotted another dog. Jenny was fixated on the dog she wanted to meet when ZAP! she yelps in pain, not sure what happened. The next time Jenny saw another dog on a walk she immediately became anxious, remembering the pain she felt the last time she saw a dog. As the dog approached, Jenny lunged, but this time she also growled

and bared her teeth. Jenny had become very afraid and was trying to look fierce to scare the dog away before it hurt her when ZAP! she again yelped in pain. Jenny, now anxious and confused about other dogs, has learned to become defensively aggressive.

Jenny's guardians did not train her to stop pulling; all they succeeded in doing is making a previously good dog, dog aggressive. If they would have enrolled Jenny in a reward based training class or made use of a Sensible or EZ-Walk Harness or Gentle Leader they could have taught her to walk nicely without ever causing her any pain or fear.

Why did Jake and Jenny become aggressive? Because they associated the pain and anxiety of the electric shock with what they were focusing on at the time the shock occurred, not their behavior. In Jake's case it was the neighbor. For Jenny, it was other dogs. Are these isolated occurrences? Far from it. I have training colleagues throughout the country that could tell you of similar incidents. Both of these situations could have been very easily remedied without ever inflicting pain and suffering on the dogs.

## What Do the Experts Say About Shock Collars?

A study published in 2000<sup>1</sup> looked at five dogs who were subjected to shock collar containment systems and who later bit people, resulting in a law suit. No dog had a prior history of displaying aggression towards people and it is believed that the dogs received a shock at the time of the attack. There is no evidence to suggest that the humans bitten were acting in a threatening manner prior to the attack. In all cases, the dogs bit the victim repeatedly and uninhibitedly, resulting in serious bodily injury. Other studies on the use of shock on other species, including humans, have noted the extreme viciousness and intensity of shock-elicited aggression.

Fortunately, opposition to shock collars by educated canine professionals and dog lovers is growing world wide. The use of shock collars has been banned and is illegal in Denmark, Germany, Switzerland, Slovenia, Austria and many parts of Australia. By the end of the year, Parliament will pass a new animal welfare bill which will prohibit the use of shock collars in the United Kingdom. Supporting this bill are the Kennel Club (the British equivalent of the AKC), the Royal Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), The Dogs Trust and Blue Cross (three animal welfare organizations), UK Association of Pet Dog Trainers (APDT), the Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors (APBC), The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association, Association of Chief Police Officers, The Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland, and the UK Armed Forces.

Here in the US, Dr. Karen Overall, noted Veterinary Behaviorist, has stated "***Let me make my opinion perfectly clear: Shock is not training - in the vast majority of cases it meets the criteria for abuse. In my patient population, dogs who have been 'treated' with shock have a much higher risk of an undesirable outcome (e.g., euthanasia) than dogs not subjected to shock, and I never recommend euthanasia. In all situations where shock has been used there is some damage done, even if we cannot easily see it. No pet owner needs to use this technique to achieve their goal. Dogs who cease to exhibit a problem behavior usually also cease to exhibit normal behaviors.***"

A group of concerned dog behavior counselors and trainers have formed two new

groups; trulydogfriendly.com (<http://www.trulydogfriendly.com>) and the No Shock Collar Coalition (<http://www.baddogsinc.com/noshockcollarcoalition.html>). A group in Canada, the International Positive Dog Training Association of is also opposed to the use of shock collars.

Sadly, there are trainers that will insist these pain causing tools are necessary to train dogs. They believe that reward based training does not work on all dogs. This says a great deal about their lack of knowledge and skills in training dogs and their lack of compassion in caring for their dogs.

If you would like to express your opposition to the pain and suffering inflicted by shock collars consider doing the following:

- 🐾 Add your name to the member list of the No Shock Collar Coalition at <http://www.baddogsinc.com/noshockcollarcoalition.html>.
- 🐾 Purchase a “No Shock Collars” button, decal or bumper sticker from the No Shock Collar Coalition or from Green Acres the next time you are in the store.
- 🐾 Boycott places that sell, use, or recommend shock collars.

As the late Mahatma Gandhi said “The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated.” Sadly, zapping dogs with electric shocks in the name of training does not say anything good about our greatness or our morality. While we recognize both managing and training a dog can be frustrating at times, there is always a better way to deal with a situation than using electric shock.

### **Recommended Reading & Links**

Why Electric Shock Collars for Dogs Should Be Banned -  
<http://www.advocatesforanimals.org/pdf/electricshockcollars.pdf>

Can Aggression in Dogs Be Elicited Through the Use of Electronic Pet Containment Systems? -  
[http://www.leaonline.com/doi/abs/10.1207/S15327604JAWS0304\\_6;jsessionid=nFup](http://www.leaonline.com/doi/abs/10.1207/S15327604JAWS0304_6;jsessionid=nFup)

Training dogs with help of the shock collar: short and long term behavioural effects -  
<http://www.ust.is/media/ljosmyndir/dyralif/Trainingdogswithshockcollar.pdf>

Vets on Behavior Proclaim: Never Use A Shock Collar – How to Choose A Dog Trainer -  
<http://www.wgnradio.com/shows/pet/choosetrainer.htm>

Association of Pet Behaviour Counselors Press Release on Shock Collars -  
<http://www.apbc.org.uk/article2.htm>

Kennel Club Call to Ban Shock Collars -  
<http://207.126.53.54/v1/?section=stories&no=3444&area=trade&page=0>

The Problems with Shock Collars - <http://www.caat-nc.org/shock.html>

Dog Trainer & Author Pamela Dennison on Invisible Fences -  
[http://www.positivedogs.com/electronic\\_fencing.html](http://www.positivedogs.com/electronic_fencing.html)

## Shock Collars – The Dogs Trust -

<http://www.dogstrust.org.uk/information/poppysopinions/shockcollars/>

### **References**

<sup>1</sup> Polsky, Richard, (2000), Can Aggression in Dogs Be Elicited Through the Use of Electronic Pet Containment Systems?, *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science*, 3(4), 345-357

<sup>2</sup> Schilder, Matthijs B.H. and van der Borg, Joanne A.M., (2004), Training dogs with help of the shock collar: short and long term behavioural effects, *Applied Animal Behavior Science* 85 (2004) 319-334

<sup>3</sup> Schalke, E., Stichnoth, J. and Jones-Baade, R., Stress Symptoms Caused by the Use of Electric Training Collars on Dogs (*Canis familiaris*) in Everyday Life Situations, *Current Issues and Research in Veterinary Behavioral Medicine*,