



# Position Statement

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

---

## **Position on the Use of Dominance and Punishment for the Training and Behavior Modification of Dogs**

This position statement is based on the understanding that:

1. As our dog's guardian we have a moral responsibility to meet their physical and emotional needs<sup>1</sup>.
2. We can train our dogs to a very high level of compliance using a variety of reward-based training methods, but we cannot dictate their emotional responses to situations. Most serious behavioral problems are not due to training or a lack thereof, but are the result of emotions like fear and anger.
3. Expecting 100% compliance to obedience cues without also managing the dog's environment is not a reasonable expectation for most dogs.
4. Dogs, like humans, are social species and usually enjoy the company of others. However both species consist of a broad spectrum of temperament types and must be viewed as individuals. Not all individuals within the population will enjoy social interactions. As much as we may want a dog to "like" a specific person or pet, we cannot make them do so.

The goal of our training and behavior consultation programs is to help you and your pet become and remain best friends for life. We believe that healthy friendships are based on mutual respect, acceptance of one another's unique needs, and a desire to share life's ups and downs while enjoying one another's company.

Our approach to training or modifying the behavior of an animal may include any and all of the following; 1) managing the dog and its environment to prevent the undesired behavior, 2) eliminating or at least reducing the dog's stress and anxiety by managing the dog and its environment, 3) defining clear boundaries and rules that are taught to the dog through reward-based training, 4) establishing or increasing the trust between person and dog so the dog sees its guardian as a kind leader and provider, 5) desensitizing the dog to the stimuli that causes the undesired behavior, and 6) rewarding the dog for desired behavior.

We will NOT recommend any methods based on the dominance construct (e.g. being the *alpha* or "top dog", alpha rollovers, scruff shakes, etc.) which basically involves correcting behavior via physical, mental or emotional intimidation. While the dominance construct has been popular for many years, and is currently promoted on a popular reality TV show, it is based on flawed science and has been refuted by experts in the field of dog and wolf behavior.<sup>2,3,4,5,6</sup> The American

Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior (AVSAB) and the Association of Pet Dog Trainers (APDT), the world's two largest organizations of dog behavior professionals, have both published official position papers outlining the problems with using the dominance construct for training or resolving problem behaviors like aggression.<sup>7,8,9</sup> Attempting to be dominant over a dog is only likely to create and/or increase behavior problems and aggression.

We will NOT recommend any tools (shock collars [remote or underground fencing systems], choke, prong, or anti-bark collars) that are specifically designed to punish or "correct" the dog by causing pain or discomfort. Our own experience in dealing with dogs that have behavioral issues, as well as scientific research by experts in the field, indicates that using tools that cause pain and fear can actually elicit or increase aggression and other behavioral problems.<sup>4,10</sup> Fear, anger and confrontation are all stressful. Physiologically a dog's body will react in the same manner as a human's when stressed. Stress causes an increase in the hormone cortisol as well as other biochemical changes.<sup>11</sup> Studies completed in Japan and Hungary in 2008 demonstrated that dogs that were strictly disciplined had higher levels of cortisol and that these increased cortisol levels were linked to increased aggressive behavior. The many adverse effects of using punishment led The American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior (AVSAB) to publish guidelines on the use of punishment in training in 2007.<sup>12</sup>

While punishment can temporarily stop a behavior it often causes new and additional problems. A study published in *Animal Welfare* by EF Hiby in 2004 concluded that dogs trained with punishment were more likely to demonstrate behavior problems and were less obedient than those trained with positive, reward based methods.<sup>13</sup> Another study, published in the *Journal of Veterinary Behavior* by Emily Blackwell in the fall of 2008 found that dogs trained with punishment had higher aggression scores while those trained with rewards had the lowest scores for fearful and attention seeking behaviors.<sup>14</sup>

## **Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Hanson, Don, 2010, Brambell's Five Freedoms, Green Acres Kennel Shop web site,

([http://www.greenacreskennel.com/pages/Articles/ART\\_Brambells\\_5\\_Freedoms.html](http://www.greenacreskennel.com/pages/Articles/ART_Brambells_5_Freedoms.html) - <http://bit.ly/au2LOn>)

<sup>2</sup> Mech L.D. 1999. Alpha Status, Dominance, and Division of Labor in Wolf Packs. *Canadian Journal of Zoology*.

([http://www.wolf.org/wolves/learn/basic/resources/mech\\_pdfs/267alphastatus\\_english.pdf](http://www.wolf.org/wolves/learn/basic/resources/mech_pdfs/267alphastatus_english.pdf) - <http://bit.ly/4TZ89P>)

<sup>3</sup> Mech L.D. 2008. Whatever happened to the term alpha wolf? *International Wolf*.

(<http://www.4pawsof.com/alphawolf.pdf> - <http://bit.ly/c7CyeI>)

<sup>4</sup> Bradshaw J.W.S., Blackwell E.J., Casey R.A. 2009. Dominance in domestic dogs - useful construct or bad habit? *Journal of Veterinary Behavior: Clinical Applications and Research*, May/June 2009, pp 135-144.

(<http://www.pawsoflife.org/pdf/Library%20articles/Bradshaw%202009.pdf> - <http://bit.ly/aborOI>)

<sup>5</sup> Coppinger, Raymond & Lorna: Dogs – A Startling New Understanding of Canine Origin, Behavior & Evolution ©2001, Scribner

<sup>6</sup> Ryan, David. 2010. Why Won't "Dominance" Die? Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors website, [www.apbc.org](http://www.apbc.org), <http://www.apbc.org.uk/articles/why-wont-dominance-die> - <http://bit.ly/crpHLv>

<sup>7</sup> American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior 2009. AVSAB Position Statement on the Use of Dominance Theory in Behavior Modification of animals.

([http://www.avsonline.org/avsonline/images/stories/Position\\_Statements/dominance%20statement.pdf](http://www.avsonline.org/avsonline/images/stories/Position_Statements/dominance%20statement.pdf) - <http://bit.ly/4rUf20>)

<sup>8</sup> Association of Pet Dog Trainers 2009. APDT Position Statement on Dominance and Dog Training (<http://www.apdt.com/petowners/choose/dominance.aspx> - <http://bit.ly/6lmj7w>)

<sup>9</sup> Association of Pet Dog Trainers 2009. Dominance Myths and Dog Training Realities (<http://www.apdt.com/petowners/choose/dominancemyths.aspx> - <http://bit.ly/6Gigqd>)

<sup>10</sup> Herron M.E., Shofer F.S., Reisner I.R. 2009. Survey of the use and outcome of confrontational and non-confrontational training methods in client-owned dogs showing undesired behaviors. *Applied Animal Behavior Science*, 117, pp. 47-54. ([http://www.k9events.com/dog\\_training\\_method.pdf](http://www.k9events.com/dog_training_method.pdf) - <http://bit.ly/84q7my>)

<sup>11</sup> Scholz, Martina, and von Reinhardt, Clarissa: *Stress in Dogs*, ©2007, Dogwise Publishing,

<sup>12</sup> American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior 2007. AVSAB Position Statement - Punishment Guidelines: The use of punishment for dealing with animal behavior problems. ([http://www.avsabonline.org/avsabonline/images/stories/Position\\_Statements/Combined\\_Punishment\\_Statements.pdf](http://www.avsabonline.org/avsabonline/images/stories/Position_Statements/Combined_Punishment_Statements.pdf) - <http://bit.ly/aclQtI>)

<sup>13</sup> Hiby, E.F., Rooney, N.J., Bradshaw, J.W.S., 2004. Dog training methods—their use, effectiveness and interaction with behaviour and welfare. *Anim. Welfare* 13, 63–69. ([http://www.antrozooogisenteret.no/artikler/art\\_training\\_methods.pdf](http://www.antrozooogisenteret.no/artikler/art_training_methods.pdf) - <http://bit.ly/8JkPfe>)

<sup>14</sup> Blackwell, Emily J., Twells, Caroline Anne, Seawright, Rachel A. Casey. 2008. The relationship between training methods and the occurrence of behavior problems, as reported by owners, in a population of domestic dogs. *Journal of Veterinary Behavior: Clinical Applications and Research*, September/October 2008, pp 207-217. (<http://www.journalvetbehavior.com/article/S1558-7878%2807%2900276-6/abstract> - <http://bit.ly/bqbtBX>)

### **Recommended Reading for Further Education**

***Dogs: A new Understanding of Canine Origin, Behavior and Evolution***, Raymond and Lorna Coppinger, University of Chicago Press, 2001.

***Dominance: Fact or Fiction***, Barry Eaton, 2002.

***Dominance Theory and Dogs Version 1.0***, James O’Heare, DogPsych Publishing, 2003.

***Don’t Shoot the Dog - The New Art of Teaching and Training (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)***, Karen Pryor, Bantam Books, 1999.

***On Talking Terms With Dogs: Calming Signals***, Turid Rugaas, Dogwise Publishing, 2006.

***Stress in Dogs***, Martina Scholz and Clarissa von Reinhardt, Dogwise Publishing, 2007.

***The Culture Clash***, Jean Donaldson, James & Kenneth Publishers, 2005.

***The Power of Positive Dog Training***, Pat Miller, Howell Book House, 2001.