

Dog Scouts of America does not advise or condone the use of physical punishment or training devices that emit electricity to the dog. These laws, based on the laws of learning and the hands-on experience of a police K-9 trainer that now uses Operant Conditioning (Clicker Training,) are to illustrate why it is difficult to use punishment for training. When used incorrectly, physical punishment can cause many behavioural and mental issues in the dog and weakens the bond between the trainer and dog. It creates an adversarial relationship and power struggles that do not help the dog learn. If you feel you MUST use physical punishment, please adhere to all of these rules each time punishment is used. But if you want to learn how to train any species, any behavior, without punishment- please read the helpful articles page of the DSA website.

1. The punishment must be something the animal dislikes and something the animal does not expect.

If the dog could care less about the punishment, it's not a punishment. If it doesn't hurt, why should they care about it? If the dog anticipates the punishment, it causes high levels of stress and you'll get a dog concentrating on avoidance instead of what you want him to do. So using a "threat" of punishment does not follow this rule.

2. The punishment must suppress behavior.

Definition of "suppress": (From Webster's on-line dictionary).

1. To put an end to forcibly; subdue.
2. To curtail or prohibit the activities of.
3. To deliberately exclude (unacceptable desires or thoughts) from the mind.
4. To inhibit the expression of (an impulse, for example); check: *suppress a smile*.
5. To reduce the incidence or severity of (a hemorrhage or cough, for example)

If something is being used for punishment, but it does not immediately suppress or stop behavior, it's ineffective and often just nagging or may even be abuse depending on the severity.

3. The punishment must be of the perfect intensity. Too much and there will be negative fallout. You'll end up hurting your relationship with the animal and losing more than just that behavior. Too little and the punishment will only serve to desensitize the animal and build resistance, making stronger punishments necessary to get the same result.

4. The punishment must happen during the behavior it is to be associated with. Otherwise, a clear enough association between the wrong behavior and the punishment will not be made. Even doing this may cause the dog to associate the punishment with other things in the environment like the presence of another dog or with other components of the behavior that you do want. For example: you think you are punishing the dog for growling at another dog. The dog might start to associate the sight or proximity of other dogs with the correction. The dog may then do what he can to try to avoid being in that same situation again.

5. The punishment must be associated with the behavior, but not with the trainer. Otherwise, the trainer becomes part of the punishment and the animal starts fearing and disliking the trainer. Or the dog learns that if the trainer is not present or able to deliver the punishment, he's free to do as he wishes. But again, there is no way to know for certain what the dog might be associating with the punishment in addition to or instead of the undesired behavior.

6. The punishment must happen every time the behavior occurs. If punishment does not happen every time the behavior occurs, the behavior gets put on a variable schedule of reinforcement. This is a scientific term for the principle employed by gambling casinos. Usually there is no reward, but sometimes you do get a reward and sometimes you get a really BIG reward! This has been proven to create VERY strong behaviors. So when your dog does something you don't like, if sometimes there's a reward (meaning no punishment or an actual reward being delivered) and sometimes there isn't, the dog is actually MORE likely to do the unwanted behavior! Depending on the behavior and how often the punishment actually occurs, the animal could decide that performing the behavior is worth the risk of maybe getting punished.

7. There must be an alternative known to the animal. He has to know what he is expected to do instead. This may sound simple, but there are many factors to consider. Some trainers only focus on what they want to stop. But they don't give any thought to what they WANT the dog to do instead. If that alternative behavior is more rewarding for the dog than the bad behavior, the dog will CHOOSE to do the good behavior! No punishment needed.

8. Punishment must never be used to the extent that punishment outweighs positive reinforcement (from the animal's perspective, not yours!) The dog needs to be getting way more rewards than punishments. Also be aware that a punishment cannot remove a reward. If the dog was rewarded in some way for doing a behavior, a punishment that occurs after the dog has gotten the reward doesn't change the fact that the dog got a reward for doing the behavior. Take trash stealing- If the dog GETS yummy things from the trash, punishing the dog after that happens doesn't reduce the effects that reward had. For punishment to be effective, it has to happen prior to the reward- when the nose goes in the can in this case- to be effective.