



American Veterinary Society  
of Animal Behavior  
[www.AVSABonline.org](http://www.AVSABonline.org)

## AVSAB Position Statement The Use of Punishment for Behavior Modification in Animals

AVSAB's position is that punishment<sup>1</sup> (e.g. choke chains, pinch collars, and electronic collars) should not be used as a first-line or early-use treatment for behavior problems. This is due to the potential adverse effects which include but are not limited to: inhibition of learning, increased fear-related and aggressive behaviors, and injury to animals and people interacting with animals.<sup>2</sup>

AVSAB recommends that training should focus on reinforcing desired behaviors, removing the reinforcer for inappropriate behaviors, and addressing the emotional state and environmental conditions driving the undesirable behavior. This approach promotes a better understanding of the pet's behavior and better awareness of how humans may have inadvertently contributed to the development of the undesirable behavior. Punishment should only be used when the above approach has failed despite an adequate effort as part of a larger training or

behavior modification program that incorporates reinforcement of appropriate behaviors and works to change the underlying cause of the problem behavior.

AVSAB recognizes that both positive reinforcement and punishment require significant skill, effort, and awareness on the owner's part. Both must be applied as the animal is performing the target behavior or within one second of the behavior to be most effective. Additionally, both work best when applied every time the behavior occurs so that the animal is not inadvertently rewarded for undesirable behavior during the modification process. If punishment is added to a modification plan, it should only be used if the owner has first demonstrated reasonable ability and consistency at rewarding appropriate behaviors and removing the reward for bad behavior. If punishment is suggested as part of a complete behavior modification plan, owners should not begin using it

until they have ensured that the person helping them is able to articulate the major adverse effects of punishment, judge when these effects are occurring over the short term and long term, and can explain how they will reverse the adverse effects if they occur.

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<sup>1</sup>For the scientific definition of punishment refer to p. 2 of *Guidelines on the Use of Punishment for Dealing with Behavior Problems in Animals*

<sup>2</sup>Refer to *Adverse Effects of Punishment* on p. 3 of *Guidelines on the Use of Punishment for Dealing with Behavior Problems in Animals*

