

Force Free Dog Training - No Choke, No Prong, No Pain!

The Pet Professional Guild - Member Resource Tool

Effective training procedures lay the foundation for an animal's healthy socialization, capacity for learning and will help prevent behavior problems.



Since a wide variety of equipment and tools are commonly used when training pets and in their daily activities, the pet-owning public needs to be aware of the potential problems and dangers some equipment may pose.

Specifically, the use of collars and leads that are intended to apply constriction, pressure, pain or force around a dog's neck (such as 'choke chains' and 'prong collars') should be avoided. Consistent with their commitment to 'force-free' training and pet care methods, the Pet Professional Guild, the Association of Force Free Dog Training and Pet Care Professionals (PPG), does not support the use of choke and prong collars and, rather, recommends the use of flat buckle collars, head halters, harnesses and other types of control equipment that are safer for the animal and the handler.

As more research accumulates on the hazards of choke and prong collars and more data is compiled documenting the damage these types of collars can cause distinguished veterinarians world-wide are joining the discussion and are calling for professional dog trainers to commit to eliminating choke and prong collars from their training programs. Niki Tudge, founder and president of the PPG, states "training should be conducted in a manner that encourages animals to enjoy training and become more confident and well-adjusted pets."

"Choke chains, prong collars and other devices like it are intended to cause pain or discomfort. They operate on the principle of making the dog experience pain when they perform some unacceptable behavior. Any kind of training operating on this principle suffers from various pitfalls."

James O'Heare.
Professional Animal Behavior Consultant.

Psychological and Behavioral Effects

"Using punishment to stop behaviors is not new. Notice I say 'stop' rather than 'teach' -- I can stop any behavior, but I am more interested in teaching my students, animal or human, to choose the behavior I want them to perform because they can trust me, because I do not hurt them and they are safe with me, and because the outcome is something they enjoy."

Dr. Soraya V. Juarbe-Diaz.
DVM, DACVB, CAAB,

According to Dr. Soraya V. Juarbe-Diaz, "mistakes are inherent in any type of learning -- if I continually frighten or hurt my students when they get something wrong, eventually they will be afraid to try anything new and will not want to learn from me any longer.

What most surprises me about the use of collars that choke (i.e. tighten around the neck so it is painful to swallow, difficult to breathe and could damage the tissue underlying the collar) is that people think it is OK to use them in animals, whereas they would recoil in horror if teachers in schools were to use them in human pupils. We use force, pain and fear to train animals because we can get away with it, in spite of sufficient scientific data in both humans and dogs that such methods are damaging and produce short term cessation of behaviors at the expense of durable learning and the desire to learn more in the future. You can go with so-called tradition or you can follow the ever expanding body of evidence in canine cognition that supports teaching methods that encourage a calm, unafraid and enthusiastic canine companion."

Choke and Prong Collars:
Health Concerns Call for Equipment Change in Dog Training
Written by Angelica Steinker and Niki Tudge © 2012
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Physical Damage

Choke or prong collars are not recommended “as they can easily injure the delicate butterfly-shaped thyroid gland that sits just below the larynx and in front of the trachea. These collars can also injure the salivary glands and salivary lymph nodes on the side of the face underneath both ears.”

Dr. Jean Dodds. Respected veterinarian and thyroid expert.

While precise data is not yet complete, there are many documented cases of injuries to dogs caused by the use of choke/prong collars. These injuries include, but are not limited to, soft tissue damage, eye problems, strangulation (in some cases leading to death), tracheal/esophageal damage and neurological problems. Many vets have treated such injuries and are aware of resulting deaths.

From a strictly physical perspective, Jim Casey, Mechanical Engineer, explains that, “A dog can pull against its leash/collar with more force than its own weight and can exert even more force if it gets a running start before it reaches the end of its leash. Considering a typical flat collar, an 80 pound dog can cause a contact force of approximately 5 pounds per square inch (psi) to be exerted on its neck. This force increases to 32 psi if a typical nylon choke collar is used and to an incredible 579 psi per prong if a typical prong collar is used. This represents over 100 times the force exerted on the dog’s neck compared to a typical flat collar greatly increasing the possibility of damage or injury to the dog. For this very reason, many countries with a progressive approach to pet safety and health, such as Austria and Switzerland, have already banned prong collars.

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Notable veterinarian, Dr. Karen Overall, VMD, PhD, Diplomate ACVB offers the following guidance

Prong collars are subject to all of the same criticisms as are chokers. Furthermore, they can do incredible damage to the dog’s neck since they can become imbedded in the skin if the dog learns to over-ride them. Most dogs learn to over-ride these collars and people who use them often voluntarily comment that they need to use some degree of pain to control their animals under some circumstances. These collars, if sharpened - as is often the case, are intended to employ pain to encourage the dog to attend to the person. If left unsharpened, these collars are intended to provide more uniform pressure than a choke collar. Oddly, prong collars were intended to be a safer improvement over choke collars. That’s not how it has worked. For aggressive dogs, this the uniform pressure response - especially if accompanied by pain - can worsen their aggression, and for dominantly aggressive dogs, this response can not only worsen their aggression, but endanger the client.

Were people to understand more about how dogs communicate and how these collars work, they would appreciate that responses other than pain and pressure are more desirable for changing an animal’s behavior. These collars are no substitute for early intervention and the treatment of problem behaviors. For every situation which clients claim control is provided by a prong collar, a head collar is the better, safer and more humane choice, although it requires some investment of time to use correctly. Some dogs are fitted with prong or spike collars because they make the dog look ‘tough’. The problem, here, does not lie with the dog.”

“These devices (choke and prong collars), when they work, do so to the degree that they hurt. With the advent of modern methods and tools they are irrelevant.”

Jean Donaldson. Bestselling author and dog behaviorist