

Open Letter To Pet Owners -

Learn About The Shock-Free Coalition

According to the American Pet Products Association (2017), 68 percent of Americans return home to a pet (or pets) each day. An estimated 48 percent of US residents are dog owners while 38 percent share their home with a cat (or cats). In spite of this, for many people, more time is spent planning the family vacation than on bringing a pet into the home.

Compounded by the fact that many of us not only work full time and raise children, we are also swamped with family commitments and countless other activities, it is not difficult to understand that when we face problems with pet care, behavior or management, many of us are tempted to seek quick and easy solutions (Tudge, 2009).



Unfortunately, the pet training industry is entirely unregulated at present, meaning that anyone can say they are an animal trainer or behavior consultant regardless of knowledge, skills or education, or

lack thereof. As a result, those who call themselves dog trainers, or even “dog whisperers,” may still be utilizing outdated punitive methods, such as disc throwing, loud correctional “no’s” and, in some cases, more extreme tools such as electric shock collars, choke chains and prong collars. All of these are, sadly, still at large. They are training tools that, by design, have one purpose: to reduce or stop

behavior through pain and fear. This, as opposed to a more humane approach where new behaviors are built, and problematic emotional reactions are changed via *positive reinforcement* and *counterconditioning* protocols (Pet Professional Guild, 2016). It is just not possible to “train out” fear or anxiety. In “behavior speak,” we need to change the *fear eliciting stimulus* so the pet no longer associates it with fear or pain, but with pleasure and joy. Only then will he be able to learn new behaviors.

Humane, modern animal training relies on science-based protocols. According to renowned psychology professor Dr. Susan Friedman (2010), who has pioneered the application of applied behavior analysis to captive and companion animals: “Within the field of applied behavior analysis, there is a 40-year-old standard that promotes the most positive, least intrusive behavior reduction procedures.” And yet, there are still plenty of trainers and behavior consultants who elect not to move forward into this arena, resorting instead to more negative, intrusive, aversive and, indeed, punitive methods while offering misleading information about how they train, and the potential fallout of such methods (of which they may even be unaware). Consequently, it is easy to be fooled when searching for a training or behavior professional (Pet Professional Guild, 2016).

“Positive relationship,” “natural methods,” “relationship building,” “positive only,” and “no food necessary” are all taglines regularly used by dog training organizations and individuals in their marketing literature. These expressions

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Don't Be Fooled By Slogans!

appeal to pet owners who may not always understand the various training methods available to them, and the unintended consequences of making the wrong choice. Unfortunately, they often find out the hard way when their pet becomes shut down from fear, or aggressive towards people and/or other animals, as a result of the electric shock. Fear is incredibly easy to instill in any animal, and exceptionally difficult to eliminate. Pet owners in such situations may end up facing a long road of hard work that can require a tremendous amount of patience, time and money to help their pet overcome this newly — and unnecessarily — created fear. Indeed, in all too many cases, a pet may end up being abandoned in a shelter, inaccurately labeled as “aggressive,” or euthanized.

The Pet Professional Guild (PPG) is the one US-based, international member association for pet professionals who use force-free training methods only. PPG holds its members to a very high standard in terms of ethics, protocols and transparency. Members are committed to humane, scientific and effective training, care and management protocols and never use aversive training devices and techniques. The foundation of their work is always to do no harm.

Numerous respected scientific studies confirm the efficacy of positive, reward-based training, as does the collective experience of PPG's highly skilled and qualified membership worldwide. PPG members understand force-free to mean that shock, pain, choke, fear, physical force, and compulsion-based methods are never employed to

train or care for a pet. PPG's official position is that the use of electronic stimulation to train and/or modify the behavior of pets is completely unnecessary for effective behavior modification and has no place in ethical animal training.

The Force-Free Method

PPG promotes the use of positive *operant* and *respondent* training methods, both personally and professionally, and holds that all training should be conducted in a manner that encourages pets to enjoy the learning process, which will, in turn, lead them to become more confident and well-adjusted. PPG members optimize the use of applied behavior analysis to systematically identify and resolve problem behaviors using the least aversive and intrusive methods, tools and equipment. Further, both PPG and its members actively recommend against the use of any training tools and equipment whose purpose and/or intent is to interrupt or redirect behavior using fear, force or pain.

One of PPG's key goals since its inception in 2011 has been to build an international coalition of competent, ethical pet professional service providers that are readily available to support

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owners seeking pet care, training and behavior services. This goal is underpinned by the ethics of delivering widespread industry transparency regarding the use and purpose of commercially

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Promote Force-Free Methods!

available pet training equipment, tools, training methods and service philosophies. In September 2017, this was supported and strengthened by the rollout of PPG's Shock-Free Coalition, an initiative that aims to build an international movement committed to eliminating shock devices once and for all in the care, training and management of pets.

Recognizing that many well-meaning pet owners sincerely love their animals and want the best possible outcome for them may already be using electronic stimulation devices with realizing the potential fallout or that they are hurting and scaring their pets, PPG launched its Project Trade program in March, 2016. Project Trade promotes the use of force-free training methods and equipment by asking pet guardians to swap aversive gear, such as electric shock collars, for service discounts. The program is an important tool in supporting the Shock-Free Coalition and a key international advocacy program.

As PPG continues to invite recognized professional experts in training and behavior to join the Shock-Free Coalition, we extend a welcoming hand to all pet stewards around the globe to join us. Working together, we can remove electronic stimulation devices from the marketplace, not by heavy-handed tactics or legislation, but by empowering pet owners through education, information and knowledge. Let's all work together to make a kinder world for pets.

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