

Problems with aversive dog training techniques

Leading UK animal welfare, behaviour and veterinary organisations¹ are warning of the possible dangers of using techniques for training dogs that can cause pain and fear, such as some of those seen used by Cesar Millan, who has announced a UK tour next year.

The organisations have joined forces to voice their serious concerns about techniques which pose welfare problems for dogs and significant risk to owners who may copy them. These concerns are shared, and the statement supported, by similar organisations around the world² and in continental Europe³.

Aversive training techniques, which have been seen to be used by Cesar Millan, are based on the principle of applying an unpleasant stimulus to inhibit behaviour. This kind of training technique can include the use of prong collars, electric shock collars, restricting dogs' air supply using nooses/leads or pinning them to the ground, which can cause pain and distress. The use of such techniques may compromise the welfare of dogs and may worsen the behavioural problems they aim to address, potentially placing owners at considerable risk. A number of scientific studies have found an association between the use of aversive training techniques and the occurrence of undesired behaviours in dogs.

The organisations believe that the use of such training techniques is not only unacceptable from a welfare perspective, but that this type of approach is not necessary for the modification of dog behaviour. Dog trainers all over the UK use reward-based methods to train dogs very effectively. Where dogs have behaviours which owners find unacceptable, such as aggression or destruction, qualified behaviourists achieve long term changes in behaviour through the use of established and validated techniques of behaviour modification without subjecting dogs to training techniques which may cause pain or distress.

We urge dog owners to carefully consider the help they choose to train their dogs or tackle behavioural problems. Anyone can call themselves a behaviour expert, but we believe that only those with a combination of appropriate qualifications, up to date knowledge as well as skills and experience should be treating dogs, and should only do so in a way which does not put the welfare of the dogs at risk.

¹ Dogs Trust, The Blue Cross, Royal Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), The Blue Dog, Wood Green Animal Shelter, World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA), The Kennel Club, British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA), British Veterinary Association (BVA), European Society of Clinical Veterinary Ethology (ESCVE), European College of Veterinary Behavioural Medicine – Companion Animals (ECVBM-CA), Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors (APBC), Association of Pet Dog Trainers (APDT) and Canine Partners for Independence (CPI) (UK).

² Australian Veterinary Association (AVA), Australian Veterinary Behaviour Interest Group (AVBIG), American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior (AVSAB), American College of Veterinary Behaviorists (ACVB), The International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants (IAABC) and The Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers, Inc. (CCPDT)(USA).

³ The Flemish Veterinary Working Group on Ethology (VDWE) and Norwegian Association for Pet Behaviour (NAPB) Norsk Atferdsgruppe for Selskapsdyr (NAS).

Further information on:

- the misconceptions which underlie the use of aversive training techniques
- the development of behaviour in dogs
- the problems associated with the use of aversive training techniques
- finding a suitable trainer or behaviourist

can be found at:

www.dogwelfarecampaign.org