



Break the chain

Using positive methods are not only kinder and gentler, but are also scientifically proven the most effective means of training your dog than using correction training.

In a recent study, Hiby, et. al (2004) “Dog training methods; their use, effectiveness and interaction with behavior and welfare, Animal Welfare” dog parents “were asked to outline their training methods for seven common tasks, rate their dog’s obedience at each task, and indicate whether their dog had ever shown any of sixteen common problematic behaviors.”

The results were that reward-based methods were more successful for training most tasks; and no punishment-based training was more effective. In addition, dogs that were trained with only reward-based methods were reported as significantly more obedient than those trained by other methods. In other words, the positive training methods won, hands-down, when it came to overall obedience.

On the other side of the coin, there was a direct correlation between punishment training methods and problem behaviors, including barking at/aggression towards people and other dogs, fearfulness, excitement, separation anxiety, and inappropriate mounting,” according to the study. This was true for punishment only, and combination training that employs both reward and punishment.

Another problem with using a choke chain is that even “experts” are human. They do miss on the timing of the correction, which adds anxiety for the dog that was corrected at the wrong time. If trainers can mess up on timing, it goes without reason that pet parents will do so far too many times. If you make a mistake on your timing with positive reinforcement, your dog just gets a free treat, whereas, if you make a mistake

in punishment, you cannot take it back and your relationship with your dog suffers.

Choke chains can also lead to things such as leash aggression when the dog is “popped” in the presence of another dog, a child or person often when he is showing normal signs of wanting to greet. Your dog might quickly make the association that other dogs mean pain, so they must not be safe.

Not only is using a choke chain a harsh lesson for the dog, it really doesn’t teach the dog what you do want. Choke chains punish unwanted behaviors, but don’t teach your dog the correct behavior, and in many cases actually “shut down” the dog and dampen their personality with the fear that they will make a mistake and be corrected. It’s no wonder that most people report that when they take the choke chain off, the dog no longer responds.

Using positive methods doesn’t mean you have to be permissive, which is a common misperception. Positive methods should promote a strong relationship and have clear boundaries. Like children, dogs appreciate and live very well with rules and limits. There is always time to relax rules after your dog learns them, but much more difficult to go back and put rules in place when your dog has not had structure in his life.

Think of positive reinforcement training as a communication tool between you and your dog, whereas, punishment and the use of choke chains to administer that punishment, closes the door on communications.

Animal welfare experts strongly encourage the use of positive methods for achieving and strengthening the canine to human bond because the more closely affiliated the dog and the human, the less problematic the behaviors.

If we could ask the dog, surly he would choose methods that foster and reward good behaviors, over punitive methods that punish mistakes. Kind

of like the choice of working for a boss that encourages your personal growth by allowing you to make mistakes and then giving you guidance to find better methods to make your work successful, all the while acknowledging your hard work and efforts. Would you choose that boss or a boss that criticizes and punishes when you make even the smallest mistake and ignores all of the hard work and effort you put forth on a day-to-day basis?

Medical issues

If the your relationship with your dog and the science behind using positive methods isn't enough to convince you not to use them, consider the following medical issues often associated with using choke chains:

- Injured ocular blood vessels (broken blood vessels in the eyes)
- Tracheal and esophageal damage (these are permanent)
- Severely sprained necks
- Fainting
- Transient foreleg paralysis
- Laryngeal nerve paralysis
- Hind leg ataxia

The very name of the device says it all—choke chain. They were designed to choke and cause pain!

The younger the dog when the use of a choke chain is introduced, the more resulting damage the dog might suffer over time.

These types of injuries are known to add physical stress and pain, and often shorten the lives of dogs. These types of injuries also cost more in medical expenses and emotional stress for humans and dogs alike.

Finally, put yourself in your dog's place and think about wearing a choke chain on your own neck. Next, hand the leash to someone that isn't always paying attention, doesn't speak your language, and

doesn't understand all of your "normal" behaviors. Just as you move to get yourself a drink of water, "pop" on the neck for leaving the handler's side. Okay, so you ask this time, "Can I get a drink of water?" The handler stares at you dumbfounded because he doesn't understand your language, so you start to jester, and "pop" again because he thinks you should be silent and still. Would you consider this training?