



## International Positive Dog Training Association Research Findings – Tools Choke Chains

**Tool:** Choke Chain Training Collar

**Rating:** Unacceptable due to high potential for misuse and/or abuse in the hands of the average dog handler.



### Operant Sequence

#### Positive Punishment

- Adding the choke correction to decrease the likelihood that the behaviour will be repeated.

For example, snapping the choke chain to stop the dog from pulling on the leash.

#### Negative Reinforcement

- Loosening up on the choke correction to increase the likelihood that the behaviour will be repeated.

For example, releasing the choke to increase the likelihood that the dog will stay in heel position (avoidance conditioning).



## **International Positive Dog Training Association**

### **Research Findings – Tools**

### **Choke Chains**

#### **Use of Tool**

Powerful Aversive

Definition – Aversive – Anything perceived by the dog as unpleasant.

#### **Proper Application**

To put a choke chain on properly stand facing the dog. Make the letter “P” with the collar and slip it over the dog’s head. When the leash is pulled the chain tightens against the dog’s trachea and neck causing a choking sensation, physical discomfort and/or pain.

When put on properly the chain should relax when released. If put on backward the chain will lock in the choke position even when released.

Proper use of the choke chain involves holding the leash in your right hand with the dog in heel position on your left. The correction is made with a quick snap-release movement across your body away from the dog. Some believe that the sound itself is a correction.

#### **Parameters**

- Timing of the correction must be exact for the dog to realize which behaviour will predict the correction and which behaviour will prevent it.
- The severity of the correction must match the dog’s level of sensitivity.
- The dog must be taught the desired behaviour before being corrected for the undesirable behaviour.

#### **Benefits**

- The dog is less likely to back out of the collar because it tightens as the dog backs up. R1



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### Drawbacks, Risks and Warnings

#### Physical

- If the collar is tightened for an extended period of time it can cause discomfort, pain, injury and/or asphyxiation.
- Too severe a correction can cause injury to the trachea or cause the trachea to collapse.
- Too severe a correction or tightening for an extended period of time can cause discomfort, pain, injury to the muscles of the dog's neck, spinal injury. Blindness R2, brain damage, R3 and even death.
- The smaller the links of the collar, the higher the risk to the dog. R4
- The higher the collar is on the dog's neck, the higher the risk to the dog. R5
- Since an uneducated handler has a 50% chance of putting the collar on correctly, there is a 50% chance that the collar will lock in a choke position.
- Because proper use of the choke chain involves good timing and reflexes, coordination, awareness and sensitivity, the risk for abuse is high.
- Choke chains have been known to cause irritation, wounds and infection.
- If the choke collar is left on the dog when unsupervised, the dog can become caught by the collar and injure itself, causing skin degloving of the neck and head, strangulation or even death.
- If the choke collar is left on a growing dog the collar will become tighter and tighter and eventually break through the fur and skin causing irritation, wounds, discomfort, pain, strangulation and even death.
- If the choke chain is left on while two dogs are playing together, a dog's jaw can become caught in the chain causing injury to one or both dogs.



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- If the dog hits the end of the leash, life line or retractable leash with any force it can cause injury or even death.
- If positioned too close to the ears, the correction will affect the sensitive nerve bundles that exit just below the dog's ears.
- Due to the factors listed above, it is the opinion of IPDTA members that the risks outweigh the benefits.

#### Behavioural

- Choke chain collars have been known to cause fear, submission, aggression, stress, depression and avoidance behaviours.
- Improper use of the choke chain is seldom effective in changing unwanted behaviour.
- The stress, anxiety and fear caused by the correction can increase aggressive behaviour, the severity and frequency of aggressive episodes.

#### Psychological

- Unwanted associations may be created if the dog pairs up the unpleasant experience with someone or something in the environment at the moment it is choked. For example, if the dog is focused on a child when corrected, it may create an unpleasant association with children. This association can cause fear of children leading to fear aggression.
- The unpleasant experience can create fear and distrust of the handler.
- The unpleasant experience can create fear and distrust of anyone or anything in the environment.



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- In order to effectively stop an unwanted behaviour with as few corrections as possible, the dog's temperament and level of sensitivity must be known. Since there is no way to know how sensitive the dog is to the physical correction without correcting it, the risk of making a mistake is high. If you start too high and work your way down you can create fear and/or aggression. If you start too low and work your way up you can desensitize the dog to the correction and/or cause habituation; which is the ability to stop reacting to meaningless stimuli through repeat exposure. <sup>R6</sup> When this occurs you will require higher and higher levels of correction to stop the unwanted behaviour. Finding the correct intensity of choke risks causing pain, physical harm, damaging the dog's temperament and/or creating new behavioural problems.
- The unpleasant experience can cause stress, anxiety, and/or depression, leading to other behavior issues and/or the inability to learn.

#### Mechanical

- Unlike the pinch collar the choke chain does not have limited constriction; thus, increasing the risk of abuse.

#### **Limitations**

- Excellent timing, reflexes, coordination, awareness and sensitivity are essential to proper use of the choke chain.
- Since it takes very little strength to deliver a severe correction, the risk for misuse and abuse is high.
- Because human behaviour is often affected by emotions, there is a risk of bad judgment and/or timing on part of the handler.
- The dog may not be able to feel the correction if there is too much hair between the chain and the skin.
- This tool can only be effective once the dog understands the desired response.



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- The choke chain is only effective if put on and used properly.
- The choke chain collar can only be used during supervised training.

### **References**

- R1 - Professional Standards for Dog Trainers, Delta Society 2001, Page 20  
R2 - Guide to Humane Dog Training, American Humane Association 1998-2001 Page 28  
R3 - Guide to Humane Dog Training, American Humane Association 1998-2001 Page 28  
R4 - Guide to Humane Dog Training, American Humane Association 1998-2001 Page 28  
R5 - Guide to Humane Dog Training, American Humane Association 1998-2001 Page 28  
R6 - "Habituation" - Excel-lerated Learning, Pamela J Reid Ph.D., James & Kenneth Publishers 1996 Page 37-38