



International Positive Dog Training Association

Research Findings – Tools

Shock Equipment

Tool: Shock Collar Products

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



Operant Sequence

Positive Punishment

- Adding the static shock to decrease the likelihood that the behaviour will be repeated. For example, shocking the dog to stop the barking.

Negative Reinforcement

- Ending the shock to increase the likelihood that the behaviour will be repeated. For example, ending the shock to keep the dog in heel position (avoidance conditioning).

Use of Tool: Powerful Aversive

Proper Application

The collar holds a receiver unit in the form of a small box with metal studs that rest under the dog's chin, against the skin of its neck.



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Research Findings – Tools

Shock Equipment

Remote Controlled Shock Collars

A hand-held remote controlled transmitter allows the handler to trigger an electrical charge. This shocks the dog through the metal studs on the receiver. Some units include; the option of a tone button, which is used as a warning that a shock will follow if the behaviour continues.

Sound Activated Shock Collars

These collars are triggered by the dog's own bark as the sound activates a microphone on the receiver itself to trigger the shock.

Invisible Fence Shock Systems

These systems consist of an emitter, a receiver collar and an antenna wire that is buried in the ground around the perimeter of the containment area. Flags visually mark the perimeter until the dog knows and no longer crosses the boundary. The emitter is plugged into a regular household power outlet and generates a low frequency radio signal. As the dog approaches the boundary, the emitter emits a warning beep. If the dog crosses the line it receives a shock.

Parameters

- Timing of the shock must be exact for the dog to realize which behaviour will predict the shock.
- Timing of the warning must be exact for the dog to realize how to avoid the shock.

Benefits

- If timed correctly, the unpleasant, painful or frightening stimulus of the shock frightens the dog, making it less likely to perform the behaviour, to avoid the shock.



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Research Findings – Tools

Shock Equipment

- If timed correctly, the tone that predicts the shock may prevent the dog from exhibiting the unwanted behavior and eliminating the need to shock the dog.
- The remote control gives the handler the ability to make corrections at a distance.
- Once the dog shows avoidance behaviour towards the flags of the invisible fence system, they can be moved to other areas where the owner does not want the dog to go.
- Unlike remote-controlled systems, the collar triggered by the dog's bark and the invisible fence are not dependent upon human timing and therefore consistency is more likely.

Drawbacks, Risks and Warnings

Physical

- The electric shock emitted causes an unpleasant sensation with a high potential for causing pain and/or physical injury.
- Even low levels of shock have been known to cause irritation, infection and burns.
- With invisible fence systems, a dog may be injured by animals or people crossing the boundary and entering the dog's territory rendering the dog cornered.
- Because the shock itself is an electrical charge it can affect the central nervous system of the dog.
- Dogs prone to heart problems could experience complications due to this electrical charge.
- With the invisible fence system dogs who escape the territory are in danger of being hit by cars and other environmental dangers.



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Shock Equipment

- Since dogs have a higher level of saline in their systems than do humans, the effects of shock will be more severe on a dog than that felt by a human.

Behavioural

- Shock equipment has been known to cause fear, submission, aggression, stress, depression and avoidance behaviours. During a study of the behavioral effects of shock equipment, dogs have responded by “lowering their ear and tail positions, giving high sounding yelps, flicking their tongues, squealing, displaying avoidance behavior, and occasionally exhibiting redirected aggression. These responses suggest that the shocks are painful, because these behaviors are associated with pain, fear and stress in dogs.” R5
- The anxiety caused by the shock can increase aggressive behaviour, the severity and frequency of aggressive episodes.
- With the invisible fence system, if the dog crosses the boundary it is unlikely to re-enter the territory for fear of being shocked, hence the dog is trapped outside of the boundary.
- Some dogs learn that if they run back and forth across the barrier, they can wear out the batteries.

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 shocked. For example, if the dog is focused on a child when shocked, it may create an unpleasant association with children. This association can cause fear of children which could lead 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.



International Positive Dog Training Association Research Findings – Tools Shock Equipment

In order to effectively stop an unwanted behaviour with as few shocks 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 shock without shocking 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 shock and/or cause habituation; that is the ability to stop reacting to meaningless stimuli through repeat exposure. When this occurs you will require higher and higher levels of intensity to stop the unwanted behaviour. Finding the correct intensity of shock risks causing pain, physical harm, damaging the dog's temperament, and/or creating new behaviour problems.

- The unpleasant experience can cause stress, anxiety, and/or depression, leading to other behavior issues and/or the inability to learn.
- With an invisible fence system a dog may be traumatized by animals or people crossing the boundary and entering the dog's territory.

Mechanical

- Equipment has been known to malfunction and remain stuck in shock mode.
- Equipment has been known to malfunction delivering high voltage shocks.
- Equipment has been known to be triggered by electrical signals such as; ham radios, radio transmitters, televisions, cell phones, microwaves, power surges, other remote products and by sounds such as barking dogs, vibrations, the dogs own ID tags and other noises.
- Power surges can cause the collar to malfunction and cause a severe shock.
- Dogs wearing shock equipment during a thunder storm can be electrocuted if lightening hits the wet ground.
- Inconsistent current may occur from low batteries.



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- Some collars have only one setting for duration of shock.
- Inexpensive collars are more likely to malfunction and not activate consistently, and may deliver inconsistent shock intensity.
- Some collars have an inbuilt ability to automatically increase the shock level if the dog continues to bark. This in itself is abusive.
- Different brands of collar may not have consistent shock intensity, this can lead to misuse and/or abuse when changing products.
- Shock equipment is inexpensive and easy to access, therefore the risk of misuse and abuse is high.

Limitations

- Goals must be achieved with as few shocks as possible.
- Exact timing is essential for the dog to associate the shock with the unwanted behaviour.
- Exceptional training and behaviour expertise is essential to properly use this tool, the risk for misuse and abuse is high.
- Human behaviour is often affected by emotions therefore there is a risk of bad judgment and/or timing on the part of the handler due to his/her reaction to the dog's behaviour.
- The dog may not be able to feel the shock if there is too much hair between the metal studs and the skin. Therefore, shaving the fur may be necessary.
- This tool can only be effective once the dog understands the desired response.
- Invisible fence systems cannot be used for dogs with fear or aggression problems because outsiders can freely enter the dog's territory.



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- The invisible fence system is not effective without proper set-up and training.
- Environmental management to prevent the unwanted behaviour from occurring

Note: The severity of any positive punishment or negative reinforcement technique must be suitable for sensitivity level of the dog and only used on dogs with confident and resilient temperaments. It is the united opinion of the IPDTA that anything that causes intimidation, stress, anxiety, fear or pain is not acceptable.

Note: As a research experiment, a shock collar designed for sensitive and small dogs was brought in to an IPDTA meeting. We set the collar at its lowest setting, one out of a possible ten. Each one of us held the collar with both prongs against the palm of our hand while the trigger was pressed. All members yelled in surprise, some claimed it was painful and all refused to be shocked a second time. Due to our research and experience, we have voted unanimously that shock equipment is not only unacceptable and unnecessary, it can be abusive.

References

- R1 - Professional Standards for Dog Trainers, Delta Society 2001
R2 - Guide to Humane Dog Training, American Humane Association 1998-2001
R3 - Research Review by Erica Wagner, Ph.D, of article "Training Dogs with the help of the shock collar: short and long term behavioral effects." from an issue of Applied Animal Behavior Science, Schilder, M.B.H. and van der Bord, J.A.M.