BVA British Veterinary Association | Policy statement

BVA and BSAVA policy position on the use of aversive training devices in dogs and cats

Executive summary

BVA and BSAVA support and recommend positive training methods as the most effective training intervention for companion animals in terms of health, welfare and behavioural outcomes.[1, 2, 3,4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13]

[1] NJ Rooney, S Cowan, 2011. Training methods and owner–dog interactions: Links with dog behaviour and learning ability. Applied Animal Behaviour Science. Volume 132, Issues 3–4 https://doi.org/10.1016/j.applanim.2011.03.007

[2] Arhant,C. Et Al., 2010. Behaviour of smaller and larger dogs: Effects of training methods, inconsistency of owner behaviour and level of engagement in activities with the dog Applied Animal Behaviour Science Volume 123, Issues 3–4 https://doi.org/10.1016/j.applanim.2010.01.003

[3] Herron, ME., Shofer FS., Reisner IR., 2009. Survey of the use and outcome of confrontational and non-confrontational training methods in client-owned dogs showing undesired behaviors Applied Animal Behaviour Science, Volume 117, Issues 1–2. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.applanim.2008.12.011

[4] Blackwell, EJ.,Twells, C., Seawright,A., 2009. The relationship between training methods and the occurrence of behavior problems, as reported by owners, in a population of domestic dogs Journal of Veterinary Behavior: Clinical Applications and Research, Volume 3, Issue 5 https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jveb.2007.10.008

[5]Deldalle,S., Gaunet,F., 2014. Effects of 2 training methods on stress-related behaviors of the dog (Canis familiaris) and on the dog–owner relationship. Journal of Veterinary Behavior: Clinical Applications and Research Volume 3, Issue 5, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jveb.2007.10.008

[6] Cooper, J. J. et al., 2014. The welfare consequences and efficacy of training pet dogs with remote electronic training collars in comparison to reward based training. PLoS ONE, 9(9), p.e102722. Available at: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4153538/

[7] Dale, Podlesnik & Elliffe, 2017. Evaluation of an aversion-based program designed to reduce predation of native birds by dogs: An analysis of training records for 1156 dogs. Applied Animal Behaviour Science, 191, pp.59–66. Available at: https://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/2292/23641/whole.pdf?sequence=2

[8] Guilherme Fernandes, Olsson & Vieira de Castro, 2017. Do aversive-based training methods actually compromise dog welfare?: A literature review. Applied Animal Behaviour Science, 196(C), pp.1–12.

[9] Masson et al., 2018. Electronic training devices: Discussion on the pros and cons of their use in dogs as a basis for the position statement of the European Society of Veterinary Clinical Ethology. Journal of Veterinary Behavior, 25, pp.71–75. Available at: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1558787818300108

[10] Lysons, R. 2015. A review of recent evidence in relation to the welfare implications for cats and dogs arising from the use of electronic shock collars. Available at: https://beta.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2017-12/electronic-collars-in-dogs-and-cats-review-of-welfare-implications.pdf

[11] European Society of Veterinary Clinical Ethology. Electronic Training Devices: ESVCE Position statement. Available at: https://www.flvetbehavior.com/uploads/7/7/3/4/77348517/esvce-position-statement-e-collar.pdf

[12] Schalke, E, Stichnoth, J, Ott, Stefanie, Jones-Baade, 2006. Renate Clinical signs caused by the use of electric training collars on dogs in everyday life situations. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science - APPL ANIM BEHAV SCI. Vol. 105* doi: 10.1016/j.applanim.2006.11.002

13 Cooper, Jonathan and Wright, Hannah and Mills, Daniel and Casey, Rachel and Blackwell, Emily and Van Driel, Katja and Lines, Jeff (2013) Studies to assess the effect of pet training aids specifically remote static pulse systems on the welfare of domestic dogs. Project Report. Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Available at: http://eprints.lincoln.ac.uk/14566/

Under the UK Animal Welfare Acts[14,15,16] humans responsible for animals must ensure that the animals under their care are protected from unnecessary pain, suffering, injury and disease. This includes unnecessary pain or suffering inflicted with inappropriate and aversive training methods or containment systems.[17]

We have concerns about the use of aversive training devices to control, train or punish dogs and cats. Aversive training devices include electric collars which are used as a means of punishing or controlling behaviour of companion animals is open to potential abuse and incorrect use of such training aids has the potential to cause welfare and training problems.

BVA recommendations

Recommendation 1: The UK Governments should bring into force a complete ban on the sale and use of electric pulse training collars for dogs and cats to protect animal welfare.

Recommendation 2: BVA and BSAVA support and recommend positive training methods as the most effective training intervention for cats and dogs in terms of health, welfare and behavioural outcomes.

Recommendation 3: The UK Government should urgently commission independent, peer-reviewed research to robustly assess the effectiveness of electric containment systems and their impact on companion animal welfare.

Recommendation 4: Pending further research outputs, the UK Government should only allow the sale and use of electric containment systems for dogs and cats which are either visible or audible to these companion animals.

Recommendation 5: Pending research outputs, the Government should only allow the sale and use of electric containment systems for dogs and cats through approved vendors who adhere to required criteria.

Recommendation 6: Further research should be undertaken to robustly assess the effectiveness of collars which deliver an aversive stimulus other than an electric pulse eg anti-bark spray collar systems and their impact on animal welfare.

Recommendation 7: In the parts of the UK where their use remains legal, BVA and BSAVA call for a code of practice, as well as the regulation of the sale of other collars which deliver an aversive stimulus, such as anti-bark collars and detailed manufacturer's instructions, to ensure that the potential adverse effects of use are highlighted to animal owners and trainers.

[14] Animal Welfare Act 2006 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/45/pdfs/ukpga_20060045_en.pdf
[15] Animal Health and Welfare Act (Scotland) 2006 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2006/11/contents
[16] Welfare of Animals Act (Northern-Ireland) 2011 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2011/16/pdfs/nia_20110016_en.pdf
[17] Scottish Government, 2018. Dog training aids: guidance