



WHY PUNISHMENT DOESN'T WORK

The use of punishment can have many negative effects, including making your dog feel pain, fear and stress, therefore endangering your dog's welfare. Not only does this mean that your relationship with your dog will start to break down, but, as with humans, the dog's ability to learn and focus will be seriously impeded under such conditions. As a result the dog will find it even harder to learn not to do the behaviour and you are making life harder for both of you.

You must seriously consider the fact that where the behaviour is caused by anxiety or fear, the use of punishment can intensify the occurrence and severity of the behaviour problem. For example, a dog that becomes nervous or insecure when left alone in the home may mess in the house. When the owner returns they may verbally or physically punish the dog and therefore further heighten the dogs general anxiety levels. It then follows that the dog is even more likely to mess in the house when left alone.

- Getting the timing right

Never punish your dog for something that he is no longer doing, as it will make your dog fearful of you. For example, if you shout at your dog after you arrive home and discover he has messed in the house he will not associate his past action (messaging on the carpet) with your present mood and will instead think that you are being upset with his current behaviour. If you do punish your dog after the act, he will probably try to appease the situation and calm you down by acting submissively (hanging his head low, ears flat, tail tucked under etc.) Contrary to the owner's interpretation of this behaviour, he is not acting guiltily, but from fear of you.

- Punishment means receiving attention

Physical punishment at any time is unnecessary and does not work. If punishment did work the dog should never perform that behaviour again but all too often the behaviour does crop up again and the level of punishment has to intensify to extinguish it again temporarily. A bored and under stimulated dog may be trying to get the owner's attention and therefore may even enjoy being chased with a newspaper, as the dog sees it as having gained its owner's attention.

Alternatively the owner may have used punishment in a repetitive and untimely manner, meaning the dog no longer reacts to it. For instance, the punishment may start with the owner shouting 'come' every time their dog runs off on a walk. To begin with the dog pays attention to his owner when he shouts, but learns over time that when it returns to the owner it doesn't get a nice welcome. Subsequently, when the dog runs off the owner starts to get really angry, shouting even louder and more frequently. The dog, unwilling to return to its owner, soon becomes confused about the 'come' command, and, because his owner shouts every time he runs away, quickly believes the command 'come' means 'don't come back'.

- Breakdown in human-dog relationships

It is not uncommon for dogs to interpret punishment as a threat and a challenge. Physical punishment can badly damage the relationship between you and your dog. Depending on your dog's personality, a defence response may result, possibly in the form of aggression. By avoiding the use of punishment the dog will not feel the need to defend itself or compete with you. Instead the dog's respect for his owner can be maintained, so the dog will be more likely to co-operate with the owner. Without a good relationship training can be difficult.

- Association with other people, animals, places.

When you punish your dog for some thing you find inappropriate you may inadvertently build up an association between the punishment and a person, object, animal or anything else in the dog's environment at the time of the punishment. This can lead to fear and aggressive displays towards this person, animal or object and the dog will see them as a precursor to the punishment. What will then happen is that the dog will want to increase the distance between them self and the threat which can lead to a deterioration in the dog's behaviour.

- Is punishment ever appropriate?

In order to show disapproval of a dog's behaviour, the owner has to act at the same time as the behaviour is actually occurring. The owner can try startling the dog by making a sudden loud noise (e.g. banging a book on a table). Great care must be taken however as the owner does not want the dog to associate the loud noise with the owner but with their own behaviour. Therefore the owner must not look or interact with the dog during the process. The dog must think to itself, "although my owner doesn't seem to notice me, that horrid loud noise happens whenever I do this - I don't like that noise so I will try to avoid it by not doing this again".