



## **Punishment**

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Companion Dogs**

Punishment is anything that follows a behavior (or action) that makes the behavior occur less often. The punishment must **IMMEDIATELY** follow the behavior, **BEFORE** the dog has a chance to do another behavior.

### **Rules of Punishment**

Vary the punishment. Do not solely rely on a rattle can, beanbag, water, etc. Change the punishment techniques. This will prevent the dog from becoming habituated (or accustomed) to the punishment.

The dog's very last action is the one connected with your punishment. Be certain that you are punishing the **EXACT** behavior that you want to stop. Usually owners believe that they are punishing the behavior that they want to stop when in reality they are punishing an entirely different behavior.

Have your punishment be effective the first time. The more you nag and nag a dog, the less responsive the dog is and the less effective your punishment attempts will be. While it is important that the type and severity of the punishment be appropriate for your dog, try to have the punishment effective **IMMEDIATELY**.

Use punishment infrequently. Try to replace the problem behavior with a desired behavior. For example, barking and scratching at the door can be replaced with sitting quietly at the door. Jumping on you can be replaced with sitting quietly. If you only punish the behavior instead of replacing the behavior, you will damage the relationship with the dog. Encourage the dog to simply exchange a problem behavior for a non-problem behavior and thereby eliminate the problem.

Try to have the environment administer the punishment. Creative "booby trapping" of the dog's surroundings can be very effective.

**Do not** reinforce after a punishment. Simply make the punishment and forget it. Do not try and "make up" with the dog or allow the dog to engage in the behavior you just punished. Simply punish, **but not in anger!**

**Do not** use the training collar as a tool of punishment. The collar's **ONLY** use is to teach heeling. Your dog should respond to you because of verbal cues, body language, and gestures. To grab at the dog's collar to make a correction is not only ineffective, but will do a dandy job of teaching the dog to bite.

### **Myths of Punishment**

*He knew he was wrong!* Of course the dog put his ears back, tail down and ran away when you came through the door. Of course you saw the trash had been tipped over again. Of course, you thought the dog *knew he was guilty* and was running away because of it.

**NOPE!!** The dog has simply associated your presence plus trash strewn around with punishment. Whenever there is trash strewn about plus your appearance, punishment happens. After all, when have you ever given the dog a food reinforcer when he has tipped over the trash?

*He does it out of spite.* Dogs cannot act out of spite or vengeance. Usually when the dog has "misbehaved", it is from an emotional upset not out of spite. The dog may very well defecate on the rug because you have left him alone for twelve hours. The motivation is emotional upset, not guilt.

*He looks guilty.* The supposed guilt you see is only submission. The dog is trying to deflect the anger of his pack leader by assuming the position of a submissive or lower ranking puppy. If you were a well-socialized dog, rather than a silly person, and saw submissive body posture, you would stop the attack. Being only a dull human, you usually ignore these signs and wallop the dog anyway.

*I've raised fifteen dogs by beating them and they were fine.* Sure, you may have raised dogs in a particular way before, but why not try a different way? What worked on the first dog may backfire on your second dog due to different personalities, backgrounds, etc. Dog training and behavior therapy have come a long way. We know so much more about behavior, operant conditioning and learning theories today. Why not try a more reliable and gentle way of living with a dog?

## Reinforcement

Reinforcement is anything applied after a behavior that makes the behavior occur more often. Reinforcement methods are as different as each dog. What is reinforcing to one dog may not be reinforcing to another.

### Rules of Reinforcement

Be sure that the reinforcement is under your conscious control. Know what you are reinforcing and why. Reinforcement must happen **IMMEDIATELY** after the behavior occurs for it to be effective (somewhat like punishment).

Know what behavior you are trying to reinforce so that you can time your reinforcement correctly. The reinforcement must happen **IMMEDIATELY** after the behavior. If you wait too long, you will wind up reinforcing a different behavior than you intended.

Vary your reinforcers. Try to use a verbal reinforcer, food, scratching your dog's belly, or throwing a ball. Keep the dog fresh and working for the reinforcers by varying them.

Do not reinforce every time. Have the dog work for occasional reinforcers.

### Attention as a Reinforcer

Just paying attention to the dog can be a reinforcer. Sometimes owners can teach a dog to do the wrong behaviors because the dog is reinforced by attention.

Yelling a dog's name when he engages in the wrong behavior is teaching the dog to do that behavior simply to get your attention. A name tells the dog who he is not that the behavior is wrong. **Do not** use the dog's name as an attention getter.

When you pay attention to your dog, think what behavior the dog was doing just before you paid attention to him. Whatever that behavior was, you just reinforced it.

## Is Your Dog a Family Member?

The dog is the most social domesticated creature we have. You have invited the dog into your life and must provide him with adequate social contact. There is no such thing as an *outside* dog! Your dog must be a member of your pack!

Many times behavior problems are caused by the isolation of the dog from the family circle or pack. Digging, barking, chewing and unruliness may seem to be unrelated to isolation but are frequently caused by it. **Be sure** that the dog is included in your life to prevent behavior problems from starting.