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## INTRODUCTION

Client's Using E-Collars?

Educate by teaching LIMA!

**We've all had clients who for whatever reason had their dogs "trained" using a shock or e-collar. Often, these trainers are recommended through a veterinarian or some other reliable source. However, those who recommend, and those who follow these recommendations, are unknowingly causing harm to their dog. No one is deliberately trying to cause harm: just the opposite. They are trying to get help!**

**Unfortunately, some pet parents, and trainers are still using the E-Collar as a training method. Sometimes they end up becoming our clients. As a trainer what do you do? There are two options. One option is to request them to stop using the e-collar before you schedule a consultation which boxes you both in a corner, as**

they may not acquiesce; resulting in them not showing up, and you losing a chance to help. The second option is to accept them while they are still using the e-collar. By choosing this option, you have at least opened the door to introduce more positive training. The goal being to get them under your wing where you can then begin to educate and establish trust and credibility. These must be established before you can expect any changes in the pet parents' attitude or receptivity. As a trainer you now have the golden opportunity to change the pet parents' perspective by introducing the concept of positive reinforcement. Education is done without condemning or being critical and is paramount in increasing the likelihood that you will be able to get positive results. This process can begin during the initial contact (either via phone or e-mail) whether a session has been committed to or not.

Generally, pet parents are doing something incorrectly by not having the correct information. So many are consumed with guilt once they find out how detrimental aversive training can be. Once they understand the consequences, they cease immediately. They need to be reassured that they are loving and responsible pet parents and were just trying to do what was

their best for their dog. Rarely do they do anything harmful deliberately. They need to be reminded that they were relying on someone else's advice; the e-collar trainer.

However, the trainers who are committed to using aversive techniques sometimes are under the illusion to show the dog who is in control; it is, "the dog should obey because I said so" alpha mentality. Or, they simply have no other skills and are training all dogs in a cookie cutter, "one size fits all" formula. When dealing with these types of trainers remember the best way to deal with their resistance is, don't resist in turn! Keep communication open. Agree where and when you can, even if it is just to admit that dealing with a specific behavior can be frustrating. A neutral response could be, "Yes, I understand that there are multiple training philosophies practiced, let's visit about a few options that we have readily available". Shutting down communication closes all doors to the possibility of educating more appropriate ways in helping our dogs and the human- canine relationship.

By keeping the doors of communication open, you might educate a few aversive trainers or potential clients, whose hearts are in

the right place, but who just don't not know any better. Those are worth the effort! Unfortunately, there are other trainers who chose to remain behind the times regarding how dogs learn or who are just plain stubborn. For some, it's their ego ruling their head, "no one is going to tell me what to do. I have been doing this for years"!

Below is information regarding the behavior protocol, "Least Intrusive and Minimally Aversive", (LIMA). By offering this information to your local vet, training community and potential clients, you can educate regarding more effective and positive teaching methods. Educating how dogs can learn more appropriate behaviors using positive reinforcement, while maintaining trust in the human-canine relationship, is a gift to all dogs and pet parents, who you have the privilege to work with. Good luck!

# **E-Collars: Not the Quick Fix You Thought “The end no longer justifies the means”** ***Here’s Why***

By Melissa McMath Hatfield, M.S., CBCC-KA, CDBC

**Shock collars are a popular and easy technique used by many dog trainers in the elimination of unwanted behavior. Trainers advertise that they can get immediate results and transfer this technique easily to the owner; justified by the commonly used phrase, “don’t worry it does not hurt”. What owner would not want a “quick fix” that “does not hurt”? That’s the goal right? To have the dog stop doing whatever the “bad” behavior is and fast! The problem is that the use of a shock collar, e-collar or prong is a correction. The trainer is using an aversive technique to communicate what “not to do” but is not teaching the dog “what to do”. When using aversive corrections the trainer has the potential to cause more unwanted behaviors including anxiety and aggression. Aversive training techniques can cause more harm than good and damage the human canine bond, your trainer should first “do no harm”.**

Thanks to various scientific disciplines such as the field of psychology and applied animal behavior the modern-day dog owner and canine professional have found themselves beneficiaries to multiple science-based methods for dog training. Dog trainers no longer have to rely on “myths” or long-ago techniques. In the past, trainers relied on the use of aversive techniques because they did not have the scientific knowledge of learning theory that we have today. Just because there was an immediate response by the dog to an aversive stimulus (e-shock, prong collar, or jerk to the neck via lead) did not mean it was a successful or positive learning experience for the dog. The long-term consequences of these training techniques were never realized or considered and, by some trainers, still are not. Aversive techniques have been and still are used by too many trainers as “a quick fix.” The current science regarding “how dogs learn” and their “emotional states,” has provided trainers with the knowledge that any aversive stimuli (e.g., e-collar, shock and or prong collars) that aversively signals the dog to stop an unwanted behavior without FIRST teaching the appropriate behavior **is no longer considered ethical**. Hence, “*the end no longer justifies the means.*”

As a result of this research, The Association of Professional Dog Trainers, The Professional Pet Guild, and the International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants use LIMA, an acronym that stands for “Least Intrusive and Minimally Aversive” have adopted this policy. It is a behavior modification training protocol that focuses on *positive training as opposed to aversive training.*<sup>1</sup>

As professionals, we strive to work under the same ethical standard as these organizations. However, there are some dog trainers, through lack of awareness, education, or habit, unknowingly or knowingly violate LIMA by using aversive techniques as a first line of defense in their training methods. Some still choose to continue to implement aversive training methods over kinder and more positive techniques. Aversive training, no matter how slight, generally results in an immediate response from the dog, making the trainer look great by providing the pet parent a simple “quick fix” training technique. Regardless, LIMA is considered the “gold standard” among dog training professionals. The use of e-shock or prong collars or any aversive technique is considered a violation if positive reinforcement of an appropriate alternative behavior has not been implemented first. In other words, the trainer must first implement a *positive training technique*.

Members of the organizations mentioned above are bound by these ethics. If you have a dog trainer, ask! What is their training philosophy? Why? Ask are they up to date on the current research and training techniques? Do you want your dog trained with an aversive?

Why? Most aversive trainers will tell you it does not hurt the dog; it’s just a signal. Ask yourself, would you do this to a two-year old child? Due to the recent MRI studies regarding the dog’s brain and emotions, we have learned scientifically and unequivocally that the dog has the emotional capacity of a two-year-old child and experiences emotions such as:

- \*Excitement
- \*Arousal
- \*Distress
- \*Contentment
- \*Disgust
- \*Fear
- \*Anger
- \*Joy
- \*Suspicion
- \*Affection.<sup>2</sup>

Ask yourself isn’t there a better way to train than to shock, no matter how small? The answer is YES!

**Below are excerpts from the Association of Professional Dog Trainers Position Statement on LIMA<sup>3</sup>**

**What Is LIMA?**

1. LIMA is a training behavior modification protocol whose goal is to apply the “LEAST INTRUSIVE and MINIMALLY AVERSIVE” technique and or equipment.

2. *Using a shock collar as a matter of course without first implementing a positive training method does not meet this first rule of ethical training.*

**LIMA Is Competence-Based**

\* “LIMA requires trainers/consultants to work to increase the use of positive reinforcement and eliminate the use of punishment when working with animal and human clients.”

\* “Consultants should pursue and maintain competence in animal behavior consulting and training through continuing education, and hands on experience.”

In other words, *is your dog trainer certified with an organization that is “certified” to certify? Earning a certificate from a local training club does not meet these educational requirements.*

Is your trainer a member of an organization that follows the ethics of LIMA? Does your trainer know what LIMA is and what it stands for and why?

### **Positive Reinforcement and Understanding the Learner**

\* “Positive reinforcement should be the first line of teaching, training, and behavior change...”

\* “Positive reinforcement is associated with the lowest incidence of aggression, attention seeking, avoidance, and fear in learners.”

\* “Only the dog determines what may be reinforcing.” For example, some dogs like treats, and others prefer toys!”

The dog decides what is reinforcing, not the trainer. For example, squirting water in a dog’s face may not be considered aversive if the dog is a Labrador! He may love water!

Positive reinforcement does not create negative emotional fallout, as the use of aversive techniques does.

### **Systematic Problem Solving and Strategies of LIMA**

A lot of aversive trainers advertise they can “fix” behavioral problems in a matter of weeks. For some this is their only trick in their training tool bag. LIMA addresses this “one size fits all” training with the following regarding what a trainer should do.

\* The trainer should focus on a specific behavior, what the dog gets from that behavior, and the consequences that maintain the behavior. This analysis should be done in a systematic approach with the individual dog in mind.

In other words, *does your trainer evaluate your dog based on its individual history, temperament, genetics, triggers, behavior(s), and consequences, or does he/she use a “cookie cutter” training approach for every dog?*

### **Preventing Abuse**

\* “We seek to prevent the abuses and potential repercussions of inappropriate, poorly applied, and inhumane uses of punishment.”

\* “The potential effects of punishment can include aggression or counter-aggression or suppressed behavior.”

\* Punishment has been known to increase anxiety and fear; causing physical harm; and a negative association with the owner or handler; it can increase the unwanted behavior; and create new unwanted behaviors.

In other words, *punishment or the use of aversive techniques can lead to increased anxiety or fear and a negative association with the handler and should be prevented.*

### **Choice and Control for the Learner**

\* “LIMA guidelines require that trainer/consultants always offer the learner as much control and choice as possible. Trainer/consultants must treat each individual of any species with respect and awareness of the learner’s individual nature, preferences, abilities, and needs.”

In other words, *does your trainer devise a training program specifically for your dog? Is he or she capable of training your dog as an individual, or does he/she train with a group mentality?*

### **What Do You Want the Animal *to* do?**

- \* “Training should focus on reinforcing desired behaviors.”
- \* “Training should focus on what do you want the animal TO DO.”
- \* “Relying on punishment in training does not address the top two issues.”
- \* “Therefore, punishment does not train an acceptable behavior.”
- \* “The animal should learn what is an appropriate behavior in place of practicing the unwanted behavior.”

In other words, *punishment does not teach an appropriate behavior or address the underlying cause of a problem behavior.*

“These LIMA guidelines do not justify the use of aversive methods such as the use of electronic, choke, or prong collars in lieu of other effective positive reinforcement interventions and strategies.”<sup>3</sup>

### **ADVERSE AFFECTS OF PUNISHMENT**

The American Veterinarian Society of Animal Behavior (AVSAB) created a mission statement regarding the use of punishment for behavior modification in animals. See the link in the footnote for further reading. But to summarize:

\*Choke chains, pinch collars, and electronic collars should not be used as a first-line or early treatment for behavior problems.

\*This is due to the potential adverse side effects, which include inhibition of learning, increased fear-related and aggressive behaviors, and injury to animals and people interacting with animals.

\*AVSAB recommends that training should focus on reinforcing desired behaviors, removing the reinforcement for inappropriate behaviors, and addressing the emotional state and environmental conditions driving the undesirable behavior.

\*Trainers should be encouraged to work to change the underlying *cause* of the problem behavior and not just address the behavior at face value.



In other words, *punishment used as a first-line technique in training is inappropriate and can cause more harm than good.*

\*Punishment or the use of an aversive stimulus does not teach a more appropriate behavior.

\*Punishment or the use of an aversive stimulus can create negative fallout by increasing the unwanted behavior, anxiety or fear.

\*Punishment or the use of an aversive stimulus can create a negative redirection toward the handler thus causing physical injury to the handler.

\*Punishment or the use of an aversive stimulus can cause harm in the dog-human relationship as it affects the dog's sense of safety, teaching him that his world is unpredictable.

\*Punishment or the use of an aversive stimulus can cause harm to the dog-human relationship as it violates the inherent and necessary trust to coexist in harmony.<sup>4</sup>  
In other words, *relying on punishment does not train the dog an appropriate behavior in place of an unwanted behavior.*

Punishment increases anxiety and fear and can cause aggression.

Punishment can make an already anxious more anxious.

Punishment can make a fearful dog more fearful.

Punishment can make an already potentially aggressive dog more aggressive.

The use of an aversive as a first line training technique violates LIMA.

## **SUMMARY**

***Shock collars do not stop behavior problems but they can cause them!***

Trainers meet frustrated clients daily who want their dogs' problem behavior changed and quickly! The e-collar trainers advertise this as a safe and effective way to eliminate troublesome behaviors. However, their focus is on eliminating the behavior, NOT on the **cause** of the behavior or training an appropriate behavior (i.e., what we really want the dog to learn to do instead).

As a pet parent, do you want your dog punished, or do you want your dog's behavior changed to a more appropriate behavior? Dog's can learn appropriate behaviors just as easily as inappropriate behaviors. Remember e-collars, no matter how slight the shock, are a tool for correction, not for a positive learning experience. LIMA is grounded in learning theory developed from the field of psychology. If you are a pet owner, please familiarize yourself with the basics of LIMA. Please feel free to share with your friends and family, as education regarding LIMA is critical in changing the quality of our dogs' lives and how they are being trained.

*Using an aversive stimulus before the dog understands what behavior is expected is correction, not training.* Which do you want for your dog? If its correction, it can be done in a much more humane way. It's simple really: weren't you happier with a patient and knowledgeable teacher than with one with a short fuse and a narrow set of teaching skills? Choose the same for your dog; be their advocate and protector.

## References

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