

What is **Balanced Training**?

“A KICK IN THE RIBS AND MAYBE A “GOOD BOY”

A wake-up Call for Dog Guardians

That sweetie pie you are absolutely in love with could be about to experience the worst day(s) of his or her life. If the trainer you just left your dog with is a balanced trainer, he is probably going to be electrically shocked and violently forced into what the trainer deems obedient behaviour. And you may never know it happened. When your dog is returned to you, on the surface, he may look fine. But shortly thereafter, when he develops fears, depression, or aggressive episodes, that he didn't exhibit prior to training, it may never occur to you that the root cause could be the mistreatment he suffered during training.¹

This article serves as a wake-up call to pet owners. It's time we face the dark reality of what is happening in the balanced dog training world. It may be uncomfortable to hear how dogs suffer, but not nearly as uncomfortable as it is to experience it. Much of what occurs is criminal. It's time for law enforcement to get involved and begin filing charges. If you don't understand how real this threat is, and that it happens all the time, it wouldn't occur to you that a trainer would assault your dog, and feel entitled to do so.



A [news report](#) of a Kansas City dog trainer from Advance Canine Training, who was caught on video abusing a German Shepherd. He drags the terrified German Shepherd into a crate, throws a pail of water in his face, and repeatedly turns the crate upside down with the dog inside. He then proceeds to kick the crate door while the dog cries. Heroic citizens took video and reported the abuse to the police.

Screen shots from images [shared on social media](#).

Particularly, if you've been impressed by their website showcasing fancy (yet meaningless) certificates and logos, or after reading the narrative of a trainer

trumpeting their lifelong love of dogs, and career as a successful dog handler. But what would really clinch it for you would be the testimony of thrilled clients. You would not know if they were fake or authentic. It's that easy to be misled into giving someone thousands of dollars to physically and mentally terrorize your dog behind your back.

"Balanced" is a term adopted by a notable portion of animal trainers who were previously known as old school, punishment-based, aversive, traditional, shock, and sometimes K9 trainers, seeking to downplay, in words only, their harsh training methods. Substituting these labels with the term "balanced" is a strategy to conceal their methods from unsuspecting clients. It is a marketing ploy made necessary due to the popularity of more sophisticated, safe, and humane methods used by positive reinforcement dog trainers. Positive training, by comparison, makes conspicuous just how crude and harmful their methods truly are. Dog owners who are unaware of what balanced training entails, wouldn't think to ask the trainer if he or she would be shocking, hanging, or kicking their dog during that day's training session.

Positive trainers and informed dog guardians cannot be ambiguous when describing to unaware pet owners what "balanced" means with respect to dog training. We must not be afraid to speak for fear that punitive trainers will attack us. Bullying is what they excel at, of course, they will attack us. However, this is information pet guardians need to know. As an added caution to pet guardians, some aversive trainers will go so far as to call themselves positive reinforcement trainers while still using force and pain to train."To know is to be empowered, and to be empowered is to be safe"- *Unknown*.

Balanced trainers are notorious for insisting that their tools and techniques are not abusive. They present absurdities as facts: they insist that shock collars don't shock; they tickle. They insist that prong collars don't pinch; they replicate a mother's loving bite, and claim that choke collars do not choke; they communicate. A jab or punch to the throat is [just a touch](#), while kicks to the ribs are mild corrections that don't cause contusions or fractures. Some shamelessly refer to these tools and techniques as educators. They justify a dog's yelps, cries, and attempts to hide while they are being punished as signs of a dog being stubborn, spoiled, or being a sissy. Oh, the mental contortions that punitive trainers go through to keep alive the fabrications that benefit them. One would think it would become exhausting for them to keep pretending that what they do is ethical, pain-free, safe, and humane. Yet, time has shown us that this is not the case.

The harm documented in the countless accounts of dogs being trained by balanced trainers ² is the focus here, but if you ever thought the brunt of cruel training was solely heaped on dogs, look into the world of horses. Horses exploited for sports and entertainment are brutalized daily, but so are some privately owned horses. They can endure [unimaginable cruelty](#) at the hands of their owners, trainers, and caregivers. ³

On October 3, 2024, East Idaho News reported that horse trainers, Roger Reiley and Tori Tropf were charged with beating, whipping, punching, and kicking a horse that had been sent to them for training. ⁴ One video provided to police of the brutal beating is

almost ten minutes long. When police returned the horse to his owners, they chose not to press charges. The police charged them anyway. The trainer's attorney stated, "This case is about training and disciplining, and unless a horse is 'broken,' he is of no value. There is a certain amount of physical force and pressure needed in order to discipline that animal correctly," He added, "They don't want to hurt these animals." Typically they use things such as the polyester type pipes that can be used to slap or prod an animal and doesn't create any physical injury on the horse. Sometimes, they use a whip." The defence given for the horse collapsing, wasn't that he was knocked to the ground; it was that he was having a hissy fit. The lawyer also claimed that the trainers love animals. When these acts of deviant behaviour, known as traditional or balanced training, occur, there are often no witnesses. But even when there are witnesses, many remain silent. To the individuals who recorded and reported this abuse to the authorities, you deserve a medal. People who stick their necks out for others are unsung heroes.

Fortunately, there is a different calibre of animal trainer available. They are positive reinforcement trainers with a special interest in learning theory and its application. They engage in humane treatment to teach animals life skills through rewards and kindness. Dogs are taught using methods supported by evidence. The optimism they have infused into the dog (and horse) training industry has elevated the profession, and uplifted the lives of animals, and their people. They understand dogs and their breed specific natures. They also know that, despite what we may wish to fix, some things are not meant to be fixed. Aversive trainers will try to tell you that positively trained dogs are overweight, out-of-control, menaces. When you hear nonsense, [call it nonsense](#). A trainer's role is to be a knowledgeable guide who fosters an environment of trust and encouragement, provides positive feedback, and requests only what an animal is capable of doing. No force or shock collars are needed. Positive trainers do this best. Dogs love their positive trainers.

It is also a delight to see dog parents everywhere with treat bags and sunny voices interacting with their dogs. A dog lucky enough to land in a loving home early in life, and raised by kind people, will probably never require professional help, or outside training. Billions of lovingly cared for dogs learn organically, at their own pace, in their own homes. Dogs who experience unsettled early years, or have a genetic predisposition to fear and anxiety may struggle to adapt to a new home, and require some support. It is important to enlist an accredited, humane, force free behavioural professional to assist with their adjustment.

This is crucial because the dog training field is rife with charlatans flaunting hollow certificates and membership in associations, which are meaningless if the safety of your dog is a concern. The dog training industry is unregulated. Training associations harbour incompetent trainers, and nobody is the wiser. An association's standards and ethical codes that members are required to uphold, when examined closely, may not offer trustworthy assurances, but instead raise serious ethical concerns. Some associations exploit their members and the industry for profit, rather than encouraging standards of excellence and fostering professional growth. The number of people

whose dogs are being seriously injured or killed during training is growing every day. The cruelty that occurs behind closed doors is rarely reported, leaving dog owners in the dark about how enormous this problem truly is.

“Stopping Them After the Fact is Not Soon Enough”

This is a recent news report about the alleged mistreatment by the dog trainer, Nikki Camerlengo of Pawsitively Paradise Board & Train.⁵ Take note of the business name, the initial hook. While police investigated a complaint against her, they discovered that three dogs had died while in her care: Fleurie, a fifteen month old goldendoodle; Mako, a two year old flat-coated retriever; and Beau, a two year old cavapoo. The three previously happy, healthy dogs never made it back home after being sent for training at her board and train facility.



Flurrie & Beau and at least three other dogs died while under the care of their balanced trainer. Image credit: WPTV News [Youtube](#)

The necropsy examination found both Beau and Fleurie with injuries and bruises over much of their bodies. Both died from blunt force trauma to the head. Mako choked on his own vomit. The examination of Fleurie’s body revealed that she had experienced acute bleeding in the brain. Detective Christine Polizzi of the Martin County Sheriff's Office said, “That wasn’t a dog that just fell off a table. That wasn’t a dog that just fell off the back of a vehicle. This was a dog that was intentionally hurt.” During the investigation, the accused trainer relocated, and people continued to give her their dogs for training, likely oblivious to the cruelty charges against her. In a WPTV News report, Beau’s mom stated, “Part of the reason I trusted this trainer was because of the three nationally accredited associations listed on her website.” This could be what others were also relying on as well. Nikki remained defiant that she had done nothing wrong. Investigators had suspicions that there would be more victims, and sure enough, seven more families came forward, alleging that their dogs were also severely injured or had died while under the trainer’s care. As of June 2024, the trainer was taken into custody.

How safe are children around those who would mistreat peaceful, innocent dogs? This brings to mind a similarly disturbing case of abuse. Only this time, the victim was a little girl named Meika.⁶ During a custody visit, her father and stepmother viciously assaulted the little girl for four days before calling 911 while she lay unconscious. Both remained defiant that they did anything



Screenshot: [WPTV News YouTube video](#) of the three associations that were listed on the accused balanced trainer’s website.

wrong. They claimed her injuries were the result of a fall down the stairs, except her injuries didn't match that explanation. The autopsy revealed internal damage to her head, abdomen, liver, pancreas, and multiple bruises throughout her body. The abusers were convicted of first-degree murder and will serve a minimum of 25 years in prison.

We may never learn what will become of the accused dog trainer, but we do know the status of at least five of the dogs left in her care. They died in intense fear and pain, without their families. This is why people need to share their stories publicly to save others from experiencing the same fate. Pet owners must never blindly trust what they are told, without verifying it. Even after doing extensive [research](#), you must attend several training sessions at the trainer's facility before entrusting your dog to them. Leaving a dog with a stranger is stressful for them and downright terrifying for some. Being abused afterward is a trauma they will carry with them for a long time. As long as these trainers can pull the wool over a dog owner's eyes, people will continue to unwittingly pay to have their dogs abused. And that, my friend, is our responsibility.

To protect our dogs, we must prevent balanced trainers from having the opportunity to harm them. Trying to change a balanced trainer's belief system, limited empathy, deficient ethics, and teachings, one by one, is a futile endeavour. This cruelty must be approached from the opposite direction. We must reach out to and inform unsuspecting pet guardians to stop inadvertently allowing balanced trainers to use their dogs as punching bags for financial gain. For those who allow their dogs to be trained by punitive trainers, we need legislation.

They Will Do Whatever They Want

If your trainer refers to themselves as a balanced trainer, chances are your dog will be assaulted during training. Breeds like German Shepherds, Dobermans, Huskies, and Rottweilers are often trained harshly. Larger, high drive breeds, in contrast to Beagles, who are chosen for cruel biomedical experiments ⁷ due to their submissive and compliant natures, may try to protect themselves when mistreated by a trainer. That's when the brutality really escalates.

Balanced training can involve intimidation and rough handling, or it can incorporate physical and psychological terror. When some balanced trainers are asked which methods they use, they respond with, "I will do whatever it takes." Balanced trainers punch, choke, shock, strangle, pin, slam, and flip dogs. Some do much worse. Restraints such as choke, shock, and prong collars, muzzles, and crates render the fight-or-flight response nonexistent. Dogs are held captive, and if they attempt to defend themselves, they risk retaliation. The mentality of these trainers suggests that they delight in their victory in showing the dog who is boss. It takes a certain personality type to feel empowered by targeting individuals who are powerless. I assume it is the same exhilaration a faux hunter feels after killing a friendly or disabled exotic animal in a canned hunt.

Dogs are intelligent. We underestimate the brilliance of dogs, and overestimate ourselves. Dogs possess skills that their trainers may never have, including the capacity to empathize. Yet, instead of having the savvy to enlist a dog's intelligence and their affectionate nature to teach them, balanced trainers, and some pet owners, opt for physical dominance, pain, and force. As a society, we have accepted this well-known secret. It's happening right under our noses, yet lawmakers and law enforcers are not doing enough to enforce anti-cruelty laws.



When large, intimidating adults need to tower over pinned dogs they've paralyzed with prong and shock collars, it indicates their training skills, or lack thereof. When a dog signals ⁸ passivity and submission to these intimidating individuals by cowering, looking away, raising a paw, or freezing, the trainers are oblivious to their signals, or they intentionally ignore them. Just anticipating the next blow, or electric shock, is enough to ignite fear and anxiety in a dog. We know that the anxiety and fear a dog experiences will not dissipate once the training session ends. It's similar to a child being tormented and assaulted by a school bully. Even if the bullying ⁹ is short-lived, the feelings of insecurity, anxiety, and deflated self-confidence can plague them for the rest of their lives. While children often suffer in silence rather than tell someone about the bullying, a dog has no choice.

If your dog acts strangely after training, is clingy, or presses to leave, he may be internalizing anxiety and fear. This could be a clue that you hired the wrong trainer. ¹⁰ Observe a trainer when they don't know you're watching, and come to your own conclusions. Here is a brief sample of the training two unfortunate dogs received at a Sit Means Sit training franchise, when the balanced trainer appeared to believe no one was watching.



[A training session](#) at a Sit Means Sit Training Franchise.

In worst-case scenarios, some dogs do not return home from training. A disturbing [news story](#), “Minnesota Kennel Owner Charged After Dog Dies During Training,” aired in February 2024 on Fox 9.¹¹ It named an experienced trainer, Ed Erickson, owner of Autumn Breeze Kennel in Minnesota, who allegedly used a shock collar to torture and kill a dog in his care. The story received attention because his cruelty was recorded. Who knows what else he has done over the years that was not recorded? For decades, advocates have been pushing for the installation of cameras to be mandatory in factory farms to eliminate systemic abuse. This policy needs to be mandated for every business that deals with live animals.

World Class Bullies

Violent training is not merely practiced by a few bad apples, or a lone rogue trainer from another era. This behaviour is exhibited by individuals who have been managing profitable franchises and training schools for decades. Confidential conversations with those who have witnessed the activities in these facilities tell us trainers show no remorse or shame for their cruelty. Naturally, they wouldn't feel upset hearing a dog's cries for mercy when they are the ones causing those cries.

A number of schools within the balanced community market themselves as world-class trainers, who produce even more world-class trainers. They all claim to be experts in what they do, and wear their harsh, aversive training techniques as badges of honour. Ignoring them won't make them go away, but educating pet owners might. Many of these places have been operating for years, and the torment they have caused is immeasurable. Some operators of these places are relics from the past, lost in the '50s and unable to recognize what decades of knowledge and science have provided us over the years. However, there are enough of them still churning out younger aversive trainers to cause widespread misery.

Many aversive trainers boast about training police and military dogs, believing this enhances their image as experts. It means little because no national standards exist for police dog training. Fraudulent, aversive, and unskilled dog handlers have frequently plagued police and military institutions by infiltrating their dog programs. This has been a serious policing issue for decades, where violence and painful collars have been used abusively and excessively by police dog trainers and handlers. Dogs trained to be police dogs who don't make the cut are usually those who [couldn't withstand the abuse](#). Aversively trained police dogs lead to many of the lawsuits that law enforcement faces each year.¹² While some still believe that high-drive dogs need a heavy hand, it is a myth perpetuated by those lacking skills, patience, and empathy. You must respect a dog to train him effectively. You must attend to and understand the nature and personality of the dog you are training. The dog must be trained at his own pace with positive reinforcement techniques only and requires the person conducting the training must be empathetic, competent, and emotionally mature. It's regrettable that these trainers impress many young people, causing them to invest their time and money in aversive-oriented schools, thinking they are purchasing an

advanced education that will teach them the most effective and modern training methods. In reality, they learn century old draconian methods that are outdated, cruel, and unnecessary. Mercifully, some police forces are turning away from harsh dog training methods altogether in favour of positive reinforcement techniques. Even in the hardened hunting world, it is being acknowledged that dogs trained with rewards rather than punishment produce equally skilled and less stressed animals. These are affirmative signs.

The reality is that certain individuals have an appetite for aggression and enjoy being violent. Therefore, it makes sense that they would choose to be dog trainers, as dogs are voiceless and without rights, making them ideal targets. Here is a deeply disturbing article and [video 13](#) of Dutch trainers, sanctioned by the Dutch police dog association, kicking, beating, and shocking dogs under the guise of training. [14](#) You can sense the anxiety and racing hearts of the dogs as you watch them being bullied and brutalized.

A person who attended one particular aversive training center described the place as a house of horrors for dogs. He routinely observed neck injuries in dogs caused by the shock and prong collars they were forced to wear. He stated that the injuries were more visible in light coloured dogs because they stood out more against their white fur. He added, “We witnessed many times dogs who were not aggressive, become aggressive, and then get into fights with other dogs, and were being injured that way as well.” His observations make sense, as studies have shown that dogs receiving sudden electric shocks exhibit impulsive emotional reactions that change their behaviour from non-aggressive to aggressive. This is shown in Polsky’s research from 2000. [15](#)

This person also said, “Puppies were suffering injuries from heavy prong and shock collar use, and were often equipped with both, at the same time. When they would limp from their injuries, their trainers were told to make them walk it off.” He added that veterinarians in the area all loved and recommended the place, which astounded him. He stated, “I will go to my grave wondering why a veterinarian would think something like this is appropriate. The number of people I saw with e-collars and prongs in the parking lot of AKC shows was ridiculous, and Schutzhund trials were extremely e-collar heavy.”

Young people who fall under the influence of aversive or balanced trainers can lack the maturity needed to control their own behaviours, impulses, moods, and choices, and may require help themselves. This is deeply concerning when they are taught that a dog behaving in the way they have been bred to behave needs those instincts knocked out of them

Pet Guardians need to know

"The application of aversive methods – which, by definition, rely on application of force, pain, or emotional or physical discomfort – should not be used in canine training or for the treatment of behavioral disorders. "

- AVSAB

Ensure your pet is trained humanely. Choose your trainer well.



"The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing." - Socrates

There is a YouTube video titled, "Training Your Aggressive Dog Fast," by an old school trainer who is still active and passing on his wisdom.¹⁶ He embodies everything that is wrong with the dog training industry. He advises dog owners to, "Ignore the science, learning theory, and their dog's feelings. Apply "obedience pressure" to the dog and miracles will happen." He does not define pressure, nor does he show the dog being pressured, but he claims that after the pressure occurs, "The dog is a kissing, cuddling love-bug." He states, "With an e-collar, you get more love, not more fear." He also asserts, "The only way to get a dog to calm down fast is with an e-collar, and an e-collar betters the owner/dog relationship." What he states, according to him, is not his opinion, it is fact. I suppose when you don't know what you don't know, you make up your own facts.

He tells us we must override any of our objections or feelings we have regarding how he does things. The Rottweiler being trained in the video is wearing both a prong collar and a shock collar while panting heavily. He lectures us as his staff member appears to do the training. After more edits, the camera rolls again, showing the trainer settled in a chair as he explains to us millions of dogs are killed because positive trainers don't understand dogs, and don't use his system to cure fear, anxiety, and aggression. He echoes a favourite false dilemma of aversive trainers: that the only way to cure tough and aggressive dogs is with shock collars and other pressures, or they will need to be euthanized.

Rewarding aggression occurs when a balanced trainer is paid for their services, which will almost guarantees that they will continue employing aversives to train. Furthermore, studies show that aggression is its own reward. Aggressive people enjoy being aggressive.¹⁷ They derive an emotional satisfaction from it. While people can change, attempting to override someone's upbringing and decades of entrenched poor behaviour leaves little likelihood that their perspectives will shift. But as they say, hope is eternal, and wonders never cease. So, fingers crossed!

Desperate Rescues Can Go Sideways Quickly

Anyone can take in dogs, call themselves a rescue, and operate without a clear understanding of what the functions and responsibilities of a rescue organization. Effective rescue organizations are dedicated to aiding homeless dogs. Their compassion and competence save countless dogs from dire situations, and give second chances to thousands more by finding them good homes. Inadequately managed rescues, however, often struggle to keep staff and face financial shortages. The solution is to turn dogs over quickly. Dogs languishing in rescues are often depressed and scared, expressing their anxieties by barking, avoiding contact, and displaying aggressive type behaviours. Behaviours that are not appealing to adopting families. You cannot "cure" fear, crate phobia, separation anxiety, barking, depression, or aggression

with punishment. When dogs are already in distress, the emotional damage ¹⁸ of undergoing aversive training is simply abject abuse.

Yet, some rescues succumb to accepting the services of balanced trainers who volunteer their services for free, or at a reduced rate, hoping they can remedy a dog's behaviour to enhance their adoptability. When a dog's trauma manifests as a more muted and shut down state, some welcome it as a sign of behavioural improvement, not as despair and turmoil brewing within. Rescues and families unaware that a dog is not calm, but distraught, can pay a heavy price. Heartbreaking accounts of dogs who can't take it anymore erupt into unexpected force, causing serious injuries and even death ¹⁹ to shelter workers ²⁰ and pet guardians. Several years ago, I came across a website where a shock trainer advised novice trainers that an excellent way to learn the effects of the various settings on a shock collar was by volunteering at shelters, and practicing on their dogs. The immorality of such thinking is frightening. Rescues, true to their names, should only ever use positive reinforcement based trainers.



Effects of excessive use of shock collar. [Photo Credit](#): Netherlands Enterprise Agency

The Culture of Cruelty Persists

The aversive dog training sector often collaborates with other organizations that also use aversive tools and techniques. They support and bolster each other's punitive methods. Puppy mills, kennel clubs, punishment-based military, and police dog trainers, along with some breed-specific Schutzhund and hunting clubs, frequently consider themselves canine experts yet actively work against legislation that would improve the well-being of dogs. For humane dog care, the Canadian Kennel Club (CKC) and the American Kennel Club (AKC) are not organizations from which you should seek guidance. Their core values are steeped in draconian traditions that have left a century-and-a-half-long trail of inbreeding, disfigurement, and disease. Dog parents struggle daily with the heartache and complications caused by genetic and behavioural disorders ²¹ that kennel clubs insist upon to meet their breed standards.

The CKC and AKC's promote this culture of cruelty through their lobbying efforts to oppose humane legislation ²² that would better safeguard dogs by prohibiting anti-bark shock collars, debarking surgeries, live animal sales in pet stores (largely sourced from puppy mills), and improvements to breeding practices, among other things. Dogs howling with bloody ears and tails, dogs with holes burned into their necks, and spent, broken, overbred dogs, are not the ones they proudly showcase on their websites.

Governments were able to shut down the entire world during COVID, but will not shut down puppy mills. They will enact gag laws to prevent individuals from witnessing and exposing animal cruelty, yet they won't ban shock collars. The government mainly

serves the interests of those who oppose improvements in animal welfare. We are being gaslit every day. Zero tolerance is merely a cliché that politicians and corporations bandy about when they are asked to address the disgusting abuses that come to light. As long as we accept empty platitudes and don't collectively demand real action, we are unlikely to achieve adequate protection for ourselves, or the animals.

In 2017, Animal Control in Toronto proposed bylaws to ban choke and prong collars in 2017. In response, the CKC released a statement claiming their members were opposed to the proposed bylaws.²³ Instead of celebrating advancements in animal welfare, they appear threatened by them, and are quick to rally their forces in opposition. The power and influence that kennel clubs have held for decades must be dismantled. One can only hope that the younger, more enlightened members of these groups will gain control and banish the old guard. No doubt, individuals should not be held accountable for the behaviours of past generations; that is, unless they insist on upholding the same old cruel practices today.

A Name is Nothing But a Name - W. Shakespeare

There is power in organizing. The rules and standards established by a group shape and define the principles of that organization. Creating a code of conduct and standards of practice so subpar that virtually anyone can qualify for membership, not only ensures that people will join, but they will do so in droves. The dog training industry isn't regulated; there are no minimum standards that need to be met. If what you've heard so far doesn't trouble you, bear in mind that the lobbying strength of organizations is frequently the reason progress is foiled within an industry. Dog training organizations that accept their member's use of aversive techniques and equipment, despite the studies²⁴ evidencing their harm, must be held accountable for the pain and suffering they cause.

Included in the code of conduct of the International Association of Canine Professionals (IACP)²⁵ is the following statement:

“IACP members may not seek to deprive any canine professional of his or her ability to conduct his or her business by seeking to restrict or ban accepted and established tools of the trade, or by seeking to restrict or ban accepted and established techniques and practices within the industry through calls for boycotts, restrictions, bans, or other actions designed to interfere with free marketplace participation of a canine professional in his or her business. Accepted and established tools of the trade include, but are not limited to, leashes, harnesses, training collars, slip collars, prong collars, head halters, remote electronic collars, and electronic pet containment systems. Accepted and established techniques and practices include, but are not limited to, those techniques and practices described in published books, videos, and professional seminars. A personal preference shall

be allowed in the individual member's choice of methods, equipment and techniques within their own practice.”

Whoa, it sounds like anything goes. What could possibly go wrong? Organizations based on education, evidence, and ethics assert opposite policies. No punitive tools or techniques are allowed because they have nothing to do with training, and everything to do with oppression, domination, and causing mental and physical pain.

The IACP offers to anyone, for a fee of \$159 USD, willing to spend 20 minutes watching videos and answering multiple-choice questions, a “Prong Collar Knowledge Assessment” certificate. ²⁶ The posting states that the assessment is to test the knowledge you already have, which prompts the question: what is this certificate ultimately good for? Perhaps it is intended to convey to others that the certificate holder knows how to use a prong collar properly, without causing pain. No, that can't



Prong collar damage
Photo: Austin Dog Zone

be it. A properly used prong collar is intended to cause pain, even when the prongs are not sharpened. Research shows that for any collar, it's not a matter of whether damage will occur, but how much damage will take place. Dogs will sustain injuries, visible or not. A prong collar used forcefully will literally punch holes in a dog's neck. As painful as this is for the dog, it is the internal damage to the nerves, spine, trachea, larynx, esophagus, ocular vessels, thyroid, and amygdala that will generate the longer term debilitating effects. Beware of phoney certificates.

“Facts Are Threatening to Those Invested in Fraud” - DaShanne Stokes

We live in a world where fakery, misconduct, and fraud are omnipresent. Dishonesty, greed, and bullying plague the dog training industry, as they do in most industries, and the scientific publishing world is no exception. Predatory journals that mimic respected publications erode reliability. When research data cannot be reproduced or is fabricated, it is often these poorly conducted studies that still get published. Papers are being fake-reviewed, and even self-reviewed, nullifying any objectivity essential for conclusions to be reliable and credible. Each year, the number of retractions ²⁷ increases, causing journals to hesitate in admitting mistakes, therefore, ultimately enabling papers that should be retracted to continue being cited. The misinformation from retracted studies can continue to influence long after they have been discredited.

A recent study ²⁸ comparing the efficacy and welfare of electric shocks versus food to stop dogs from chasing sheep could be one of these flawed research papers published in a questionable journal. It is being questioned ²⁹ by respected animal professionals who find the paper troubling. ³⁰ In the opinion of some, the paper is so flawed that it

should be retracted. ³¹ This new study doesn't align with the thorough and established science of other studies such as the Defra project commissioned and funded by the UK government in 2014, costing around \$100,000 US. That research project compared the results of positive reinforcement training methods with shock collar training. ³² It determined that dogs subjected to electric shocks suffered negative behavioural and physiological changes, whereas the positively trained dogs did not. The study's findings also showed there was no consistent benefit to be gained from shock collar training (including for recall), but that it causes greater welfare concerns, compared with positive reward-based training. Numerous studies confirm and support the conclusions of the Defra study, adding further weight to these findings.

Still, aversive trainers tirelessly try to muddy the waters with misinformation. They trick dog owners into giving permission to use a shock collar on their dog, by having the owner feel a low intensity electrical tingle on their arm. ³³ A sensation that doesn't compare to the sudden, intense shock a dog would experience on their neck. Nor would it replicate the cumulative effect of shocks of varying intensities and durations, one on top of the other, on the same spot that's already raw, sore, and inflamed. Additionally, consider the actions of some who use two shock collars on one dog: one around the neck, and the other around the groin area.

Balanced trainers love their shock collars, and if a dog is older, confused, frightened, has a learning disability, or just doesn't grasp what is being asked of him, he is in for a training session from hell. It will be nothing like the single tingle on the arm that the owner experienced.

Too often, people mistake those who call themselves dog trainers for actual dog trainers.

Certain personality types find violence entertaining and exciting. That's why dog fighting exists. ³⁴ The people who enjoy violence are the ones most likely to mimic such behaviour. Hence, the individual who calls himself Dog Daddy. He has gained notoriety by violently assaulting dogs under the frail pretence of training them. To normal people, he appears to have a psychological disorder, where he is desperate for attention, and will do anything to get it. Of course, Cesar Millan ³⁵ has also been a bane to the training realm for years, compliments of National Geographic. Both trainers employ physical abuse, such as flooding, painful collars, and hanging dogs. An aversive trainer may temporarily assuage their mean spirit and frustration with a bullying session, but they will need to escalate the next time to achieve the same release. When people are not persuaded by the science, the evidence, or the cries of those they are hurting, who knows whom they will attack next? You might wonder how individuals can mistreat innocent, voiceless animals and not feel regret or shame. The American Humane Association ³⁶ states in their position statement on animal cruelty:

... "We believe that acts of intentional animal cruelty may be indicators of serious psychological pathology and that the infliction of violence on animals is often a

precursor to acts of violence perpetrated on vulnerable humans, including women and children, and should be recognized as such by legal and societal institutions in the creation of appropriate legal and societal processes and structures."

People with issues of aggression, anger, and impulse control do own dogs, and they also have children. This is evident in the alarming number of assaults on women, children, the elderly, and animals. It cannot be overemphasized that our laws are not providing sufficient protection for these potential victims.

There's No End to the Misery One Man Can Cause

After leaving a failed career that ended in allegations and indictments while working as a trainer for police and bomb detection dogs, the man whose handiwork is featured in the images below, switched to operating a board and train facility where he abused dogs for another 14 years.

After decades of serial animal abuse, he was finally convicted of animal cruelty. But before this happened, law enforcement investigated him several times, and stated, "We received several complaints but didn't have any way to confirm them. They just knew their dog wasn't the same when it returned from there, and they didn't know why." What finally put a stop to him was former employees, armed with video evidence, who went to the authorities. The video revealed to police the extreme abuse he was committing at his kennel. In court documents, the crimes he committed are described. They are highly disturbing to hear, let alone experience. Some of his methods, as testified by former employees, included shocking, and throwing dogs, hanging them in the air by a choke chain, kicking them, and slamming them against a wall until they lost control of their bowels. Some were choked until the blood vessels in their eyes burst. He hung one six-month-old Labrador Retriever, who was boarded at the kennel, five or six times for 15 to 30 seconds at a time. An employee said it went on and on until the dog became lethargic. The employee stated he quit after witnessing the last hanging. Perhaps it was only the last hanging he observed.



Court documents revealed that this trainer and kennel owner would shock a dog until they defecated and crawled on their belly for mercy. Photo: AberdeenCruelty.com

The lawyer defending the trainer didn't refute the evidence, but claimed his client used *acceptable* training methods for training aggressive and vicious dogs. Pet owners who

testified stated they took their pets to him for basic training. Their dogs were not violent, just young and energetic. The lawyer added, “We don’t know what is accepted and not accepted in the training arena. They haven’t proven what is against the law. We may not like it, we may not want to watch it, but there are ways of training [dogs], breaking them.” Eventually, the court found him guilty ³⁷ on multiple charges, sent him to prison, and his kennel was sold. Despite knowing about his training methods, some clients still permitted him to train their dogs. Others, however, were unaware of the training their dogs were receiving. It is those people who sounded the alarm. This case illustrates the importance of not leaving your dog with anyone until you fact check everything.

Let’s Face It, We Aren’t That Nice

Certain pet owners are fine with their dogs being assaulted as long as they don’t have to do it themselves. Others are fine doing it themselves. ³⁸ This is an unpleasantness many people prefer not to discuss. They avoid acknowledging this segment of the pet owning population for fear of being accused of judging, shaming, and blaming. It is neither unfair nor unjust to hold someone accountable for causing needless suffering to others. Judgements founded on ethics, common sense, and unequivocal evidence, are very different from self righteous judgements based on hate, prejudice, and revenge.

It is suggested that tyrants are cruel because they are scared. Indeed, some people who commit abuse may be in psychological or physical pain themselves, and no one wants to add to that. However, until a person learns that what they are doing is wrong, feels bad enough to want to stop, and actually stops, it should be the feelings of their victims that we prioritize above all else. You don’t need to be empathetic to intellectually grasp the concept of right and wrong. Even toddlers and psychopaths know right from wrong. If a dog owner permits a trainer to covertly shock and manhandle their dogs, or does so themselves, then being criticized for it is a light consequence in comparison.

Children Will Show You, Before They Tell You, They Are in Distress

- Micere Keels

When a child is found tormenting and hurting animals, some parents are unperturbed, and chalk it up to kids being kids. Yet, hitting, kicking, throwing, choking, and suffocating animals is not merely kids being kids. When we question why a child would do such things, we are told that the psychology behind these acts ranges from mere curiosity to deep and profound emotional problems. While some children, when upset, find solace in being with animals, a troubled child may find relief by projecting their turmoil onto them.

Now let’s enter the adult world, where grown-ups working as balanced trainers perform eerily similar acts toward animals as disturbed children do. This is not an impulsive outburst driven by frustration, but rather premeditated, repeated acts of cruelty. There

is a strange dichotomy between how society views children hurting animals, and how it perceives adults who commit similar acts. When adults are cruel to animals for entertainment, sports, and convenience, it is accepted. We continue to normalize cruelty in the eyes of children by taking them to events such as rodeos, circuses, roadside zoos, and more. They learn to love these events when they see their parents happy and enjoying themselves while watching animals in distress.

What we can do to lessen cruelty in the animal training industry:

1. Aversive trainers can't hurt our dogs or survive as balanced trainers if we don't give them our business. Don't believe everything you read on a website, and do not rely on certificates, titles, and logos to confirm competency or ethics until you verify they have been issued from reliable sources.
2. If you witness abuse, or suspect it, report it. Complaints can fall through the cracks. Alleged abusers may be unreachable, so no further steps are taken. Follow up to ensure your complaint is acted upon. Don't give up. You may be a dog's only hope.
3. Animal educational programs and veterinary schools must emphasize to their members the significant link between training, pain, and behaviour in their curriculum and require them to recommend positive reinforcement techniques exclusively to clients. ³⁹
4. Doctors must report any suspected neglect, maltreatment, or abuse in children. Veterinary associations everywhere need to enact mandatory reporting of suspicious injuries in animals. Regions need to provide them immunity from liability.
5. Advocate for more proactive and stricter enforcement of existing anti-cruelty laws, and additional legislation to ban painful training equipment.
6. Share your story. If a trainer has mistreated your dog, let people know. Hearing the experiences of others is an impactful way to educate other pet guardians.
7. Breeders and shelter workers can ensure there are explicit terms in their adoption agreements that prohibit the use of aversive tools and training techniques on their animals. Ongoing monitoring can ensure adherence to the agreement.
8. Animal rescues can send new pet parents on their way with comprehensive care and behavioural handbooks. ⁴⁰ For those who are unfamiliar with animals, but who wish to understand them better, rescues can offer a list of ethical books ⁴¹ about the lives and feelings of animals. If we cannot understand them, we cannot possibly provide for them in a humane and species appropriate manner.
9. Don't support sporting or entertainment events that control or train their animals with aversives, such as commercial sled dog rides, and rodeos

10. Inform other dog owners about the risks and dangers posed by balanced training. Please circulate this article widely. Our greatest strength lies in the many who take action.

Nothing Comes From Doing Nothing - W. Shakespeare

When a dog suffers harm during training, few owners can take on the challenges of collecting evidence, hiring a lawyer, pressing charges, and alerting local humane societies, and the media to raise awareness. The worst consequence a balanced trainer often face from an outraged dog owner is having to refund the training fee. Moreover, the association which the trainer belongs to gets off scot-free. Both associations and their members need to be held accountable for injuries or deaths resulting from conduct permitted under the association's rules and regulations. Being conned and ripped off is one thing, but having your beloved dog terrorized behind your back is not only a betrayal; it's a crime.

When a trainer harms your dog, always report it. Even if you feel it can't change anything for your dog, you can change what may happen to other dogs. Although the training industry is not regulated, there is absolutely no reason abusive trainers cannot be charged under anti-cruelty laws. Gather evidence, pictures, and videos. Document dates, locations, and the full details of the trainer(s) involved. Arrange for your dog to be examined by a veterinarian. Collect information from others who may have witnessed the mistreatment. Inquire with current and former clients to uncover how their dogs were treated. When you provide the authorities with relevant and detailed facts, they will take your complaint seriously. If the people running a business are connected to, or have sway with authorities in the area, contact the media.

Unreported abuse is why punishment based trainers can operate businesses for decades without consequence. If not for our silence, condonation, and cooperation, aversive trainers couldn't thrive as they do.

Thank you to the employee of a training centre who provided video evidence to the owner of a corgi who was allegedly being severely [mistreated by a trainer](#) at You and Your Dog Oconomowoc. ⁴² It was reported that the training centre still employs the trainer, who pleaded not guilty, despite a video clearly showing the trainer "allegedly" hanging the corgi by a leash, while it thrashed and struggled for breath. By giving aversive trainers our dogs, without knowing their methods, we allow them to metastasize throughout the industry without intervention. Even when a trainer loses



*Balanced dog trainer hanging a corgi at You & Your Dog, Oconomowoc. What could he possibly have done to deserve that?
Photo Credit: Fox 6 Milwaukee News*

their job due to abusive conduct, they often simply relocate, and continue elsewhere with their cruel behaviour.

Know What You Don't Know

The term "dog trainer" encompasses both positive reinforcement trainers and punishment-based trainers. Therefore, when someone seeks to hire a trainer, they struggle to differentiate one trainer from another. Many assume that a trainer is a trainer, and that one is as good as the next. A checklist prominently displayed on a trainer's website could change that. It can offer immediate information and greater detail than logos. Making a mistake in selecting the wrong trainer can cost you more than money; it could cost you your dog. Some balanced trainers claim they do not engage in extreme tactics and would never hang or kick a dog, and that may be true. If the shoe doesn't fit, don't wear it. But in what universe would anyone who wouldn't do these things want to be affiliated with those who do?

Tools Permitted	YES NO		Methods Permitted	YES NO	
	YES	NO		YES	NO
Shock			Rewards		
Prong			Punishment		
Choke			Praise/Games		
Halties			Dominance		
Harness			Spray bottles		
Clickers			Isolation		
Muzzles			Force / Pressure		
Crates			Science based R+		
Food / Toys			Withholding food & Water		

Psychological blinders that keep out the thoughts and feelings that what they are doing is wrong become increasingly uncomfortable as time passes. Balanced trainers who are experiencing doubts about what they and their colleagues are doing isn't right should trust their intuition. They can join the positive training movement. They may be surprised by how enthusiastically they are welcomed, but they shouldn't be. It's who they are.

Personally, I've listened to the regrets of a trainer who forced herself, against her nature, to fit into the role of a balanced trainer. She was taught her techniques during an era when aversive techniques were considered standard practice. When she spoke of that time in her life, her remorse was palpable. Although this person made up for her past actions a thousandfold, her memories of what she did continued to haunt her.

I've also spoken with well-meaning pet owners who have gone through hell because of aversive trainers and their advice. A woman from California, wanting to express her intense grief and regret, shared her nightmare story with me. She was fostering several dogs when neighbours began complaining about the barking during the day while she was away at work. In search of a solution, she was advised by a trainer to put an anti-bark shock collar on the dog she believed was barking the most. She followed the advice and arrived home to a scene she described as being straight out of a horror movie. The dog wearing the anti-bark shock collar was covered in blood, but the most blood was pooled around one of the smaller dogs lying dead on the floor. She insisted I post her story on my website and Facebook pages, with her full name included. It was her way of trying to punish and shame herself. The last thing this person needed was

ridicule and criticism. I didn't follow her instructions. These individuals are deeply affected by their experiences and are tormented by their memories. It is heart-wrenching. We will all inevitably face regrets in our lives, but the hope is that by reading this and viewing things differently, you can significantly lessen your regrets.

The High Note: More Change Is Coming

For many years now, a positive movement encouraging the humane treatment of our pets has been driven by veterinarians (who honour their oath to do no harm), and behaviourists (who have the credentials to support their title), humane animal trainers, animal advocates, and enlightened pet parents, and it is still gaining ground. Veterinary Behaviourist Karen Overall spoke out long before others would and has been loud and clear that shock has no role in safe, effective, humane, care. Dr. Sophia Yin's Low Stress Handling movement, Niki Tudge's Pet Professional Guild Shock-Free Movement, ⁴³ and Dr. Becker's Fear Free initiative, along with the many other campaigns from SPCAs and Humane Societies worldwide, have empowered this movement and its ongoing growth. Animals are experiencing kindness, sometimes for the first time. Never have so many companion animals enjoyed such enriched and happy lives.

Tens of millions of pet parents also successfully teach their own pets without outside help. Present, committed dog guardians know their dogs better than anyone ever likely will. By building trust and ensuring safety, the rest usually falls into place. It's really the dog's intelligence that does most of the work, along with people who have the right mindset to allow learning to happen with grace and dignity, instead of force and pain. We just need to get out of our pets' way, and let them observe, and think things through for themselves. Watch them, watch us. Some learn quickly, while others wag to a different drummer. They are all smart, and we should stop underestimating them. It's what genuine respect, compassion, and affection look like.

If you need a trainer, or aspire to be one, check out Jean Donaldson's Academy for Dog Trainers, ⁴⁴ which can equip you with the necessary skills you need and connect pet guardians to trainers who can provide the help they need. Find more help here. ⁴⁵ All the dogs featured in this article suffered while under the care of balanced trainers. These unfortunate beings represent an infinitesimal portion of the dogs who have endured, and will continue to endure such fates if we do nothing. Refuse to allow your dog to become their next victim.

Gwendy Williams, My Dog's Best Friend

Author's note: My outrage, followed by worry, then renewed outrage at what a local shock trainer was doing to puppies—his own dogs as well as other people's dogs—compelled me to spend years researching and compiling information to create a website focused on highlighting the cruelty and risks associated with of shock collars. It's not fancy or high-tech, but it gets the message across. Take a [peek](#). This endeavour revealed to me all kinds of disturbing abuses that, despite being a dog owner for decades, I had no knowledge of. The unsettling abuses are not only committed by aversive dog trainers, but also by pet owners

—some intentionally and others often unintentionally— who have been unwittingly influenced by those who claim to be professionals and experts. I learned how important it is to conscientiously investigate anyone we plan to grant access to our animals—beings we chose to bring into our lives and homes as companions and friends. If we cannot do that for those we love, what hope is there for the humane treatment of wild animals, farm animals, or beings we've never met, and with whom we have no affection or attachment, but who fall under our control?

*This article and all relevant content is for educational critical analysis and commentary purposes only and to the best of our knowledge is being used under Fair Dealing/Fair Use Act guidelines and within Canadian and United States standards of fair dealing/fair use."

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