



Why punishment based training fails

According to a new veterinary study published in The Journal of Applied Animal Behavior (2009), if you're aggressive to your dog, your dog will be aggressive too.

Says Meghan Herron, DVM, lead author of the study, "Nationwide, the number-one reason why dog owners take their dog to a veterinary behaviorist is to manage aggressive behavior. Our study demonstrated that many confrontational training methods whether staring down dogs, striking them, or intimidating them with physical manipulation, do little to correct improper behavior and can elicit aggressive responses."

Indeed, the use of such confrontational training techniques can provoke fear in the dog and lead to defensively aggressive behavior toward the person administering the aversive action.

The highest frequency of aggression occurred in response to aversive interventions, even when the intervention was indirect:

- Hitting or kicking the dog (41% of owners reported aggression)
- Growling at the dog (41%)
- Forcing the dog to release an item from its mouth (38%)
- "Alpha roll" (forcing the dog onto its back and holding it down) (31%)
- "Dominance down" (forcing the dog onto its side) (29%)
- Grabbing the jowls or scruff (26%)
- Staring the dog down (staring at the dog until it looks away) (30%)
- Spraying the dog with water pistol or spray bottle (20%)
- Yelling "no" (15%)
- Forced exposure (forcibly exposing the dog to a stimulus - such as tile floors, noise or people - that frightens the dog) (12%)

In contrast non-aversive methods resulted in much lower frequency of aggressive responses:

- Training to sit for what it wants (only 2% of owners reported aggression)
- Rewarding the dog for eye contact (2%)
- Food exchange for an item in mouth instead of forcing the item out (6%)
- Rewarding the dog for "watch me" (0%)