

# Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors

Promoting the Best in Pet Behaviour



## THE SHOCKING TRUTH

There are many 'quick fix' products available to dog owners who wish to modify the behaviour of their pet. One such device is the electronic collar. The Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors advises that the use of devices that rely on pain or discomfort to modify behaviour are inappropriate as they have the potential to seriously compromise the welfare of dogs, and ruin their relationship with their owners.

### Shock Collar Risks

Despite advances in our understanding of dog behaviour and training, and the general move towards reward-based training techniques, some people still continue to recommend unpleasant or painful techniques as the best way to train dogs, or to deal with behaviour problems. While the pain or discomfort of shock collars can work to suppress behaviour, their use comes with risks, and often the underlying reasons for problem behaviour are not dealt with. Even in experienced hands, it can be difficult to deliver shocks at the right moment and to predict the level of discomfort or pain experienced by a dog; in inexperienced hands the use of shock collars can result in poorly timed intense electric shocks that induce fear and ongoing anxiety in a dog. Owners are often unaware of the high levels of pain that they may be causing their dog.



### Aggression and Shock Collars

One of the most common behaviour problems encountered with dogs is that of aggression. In many cases, aggression is motivated by fear. When a dog is nervous or frightened, a natural behavioural strategy is to use aggression to get rid of the "threat". Placing a shock collar on such a dog to stop it being aggressive can result in the dog becoming even more fearful of the situation, which can make the aggression more likely in the future. *Imagine if you were scared of spiders or snakes and were shocked for trying to swat away a tarantula or cobra from your lap!* The use of a shock collar to try and stop aggressive behaviour can also suppress the warning signs displayed by a dog before it is aggressive, which can make their aggression less predictable and more dangerous.

### Linking the Shock with the Wrong Thing

Dogs learn by association - when using a shock collar there is a risk that the dog may associate the shock with something other than the behaviour that people are trying to stop. For instance, if a shock is administered for barking, there is a danger that the dog might associate a benign aspect of its environment (such as a nearby child) with the pain of the shock, rather than its own barking. This could lead to the dog developing distrust or even fear of certain locations, individuals, or other stimuli.

### Generalised Anxiety

Another significant risk with the use of shock collars is that rather than linking the shock to the wrong thing, a dog may not be able to link the shock to anything at all! This results in a dog becoming totally confused, anxious and stressed as it repeatedly suffers the pain of the electric shock for no apparent reason.

*The APBC feels that behaviour problems can be best addressed through behaviour modification programmes based on an understanding of the motivation for each dog's behaviour, and the use of humane, reward-based training methods.*