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The warm summer weather can motivate dog owners to get outside more often, either increasing walks in the neighbourhood or trips to the local dog park. This can mean either new, or returning undesirable pet behaviours that people find unacceptable and even embarrassing.

Tips and Tricks to Help Your Clients Enjoy Their Walks Again

It is human nature for people to want a quick fix and all too often this leads them down the path of punishment-based interactions to deal with these undesirable behaviours. They may not be aware that the choke of a choke collar, the prong of a prong collar or the shock of a shock collar can contribute to these undesirable behaviours long term. Owners who are not properly informed may perceive that once they “correct” their dogs barking or lunging with a firm choke, prong or shock that it does stop the behaviour, but it is only a temporary solution. If a similar scenario presents itself again, they have to choke, prong or shock their dog all over again. Often the owner will need to increase the force used over time because these dogs are in such an emotionally fearful state, the pain goes unnoticed and can lead to traumatic skin injuries. The pain inflicted by these types of tools can lead to a negative association with the triggers the owners are trying to help the dog with in the first place. In the end, this causes the dog to experience more fear instead of less. After this is explained to some clients, they might tell you “no, no, I don’t have to actually PULL on the collar, I am not causing pain or discomfort.” In reality, these dogs learn to not pull, worried they will experience pain if they do. This doesn’t help these dogs either.

Barking and lunging at the end of the leash can be the only way some dogs get the “scary” trigger to go away. If they have several “practice” runs, they quickly learn this is the way to take care of the scenario. You can explain very simply to these clients how to work towards producing a calm emotional state, in association with their fearful trigger:

1. Ask the owner to practice getting their dog to sit at home without any distractions. They should give their dog a valued treat each time and avoid predictable triggers until this is complete.
2. Once this is easy for the dog and owner, they can try outside also without distractions or triggers.
3. Lastly, they can walk their dog, but start far enough away from the dog’s trigger where they can achieve a nice sit or walk past the distraction, using treats before, during and after. I always ask clients to start saying “Who’s that?” in a happy, upbeat voice when they begin giving treats in the face of a distraction. Soon enough, their dog will be looking to them for a treat when they hear “Who’s that?”

This is how to start the process of a more pleasant walk, for both the dog and owner. If the owner is feeling overwhelmed, offer assistance from a positive reward-based trainer in your area that you know for certain uses kind methods to train animals. When owners report they’ve tried and have either reached a point and can’t progress, or if their dog will take treats inside but once outside it’s a different story, this could mean the dog





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isn't typical and needs your advice to address any potential medical issues and/or they need the advice of a veterinary behaviorist. Veterinary behaviorists are in a unique position. They are trained with specific knowledge for animal behaviour and also a medical degree to ensure they address any contributing medical condition simultaneously.

Here are a couple of articles you can share with pet owners to demonstrate how punishment contributes to more problems.

- "Survey of the use and outcome of confrontational and non-confrontational training methods in client- owned dogs showing undesired behaviors" 2009, Meghan E. Herron et. al.
- "The relationship between training methods and the occurrence of behavior problems, as reported by owners in a population of domestic dogs.", Blackwell et. al.
- "Severe Brain Damage after punitive training technique with a choke collar in a German Shepherd dog.", Kristine Grohmann, et al.





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