



Initiative for force-free dog training
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Position paper from the initiative for force-free dog training

The aim of the initiative for force-free dog training is to encourage scientifically based, ethical and empathetic handling of dogs, especially in training situations. This initiative is supported by many renowned organizations and designated professionals in the field with a large knowledge of canine behavior based on current scientific information.

Avoiding force when interacting with dogs is a logical consequence of the knowledge we have about this species at this point in time: they are sensitive mammals that are – based on evolution - related to the human species. A scientifically based, empathetic interaction with dogs that benefits from their ability and eagerness to learn, hence, cannot to be considered as „anthropomorphism“. It is rather an expression of our capacity and responsibility to implement new knowledge and to live up to the responsibility we have towards our dogs and, as dog owners, towards society.

Force does not start with electric shock collars, but already with psychological intimidation and techniques such as tugging on the lead, which has been shown to lead to lesions in the throat and neck area of dogs (Hallgren).

This forceful interaction is often based on the outdated „dominance“ theory, which claims that humans must be the leaders and must – often using aversive methods which lead to pain or psychological stress - defend themselves against their dogs who are supposedly attempting to „dominate“ them. Not only is this theory scientifically outdated (e.g. Bradshaw, Yin), but also the methods based on it can be dangerous for the people, the dog and the social environment. Dogs trained with aversive methods more frequently tend to show aggressive behaviors towards people (e.g. Herron). Prof. John Bradshaw's book „Dog Sense“/„In Defence of Dogs“ offers a good overview of the current scientific knowledge.

The same is true of the statement that „certain dogs“ – mainly those showing behavior problems – „need a stronger hand“. This argument completely ignores the fact that the majority of behavior problems are based on fear and uncertainty that cannot disappear through punishment, as this only suppresses the symptoms, but does not tackle the underlying problem, i.e. fear. Sustainable training works on the level of emotions, changing them to positive ones using non-aversive training techniques.

Some reasons why scientifically outdated theories and, consequently, misinterpretations of canine behavior continue to exist also among many dog trainers and dog psychologists are consequences of the fact that the terms „dogtrainer / dog psychologist“ or “dog behaviourist” are not protected and that not all teaching institutions actually teach non-aversive, scientifically based methods.

The history of scientifically based interactions with dogs (therapies, training, social interactions) is similar to that of pedagogy with children. Fifty years ago, it was normal to beat children as a form of education. Today we luckily know better. This development should also be the aim in the education of and interaction with dogs (and other animals). As is true for us humans, dogs cannot learn (well) if they are stressed or in pain. A TV-show promoting a nanny, who suffocates children to near loss of consciousness, would immediately be taken off the air and the company sued. Dogs do not yet have this protection at this point in time, as forceful methods such as just described are regularly shown on television. Anybody who is familiar with canine body language and learning theory can, however, immediately recognize that these dogs, supposedly „healed“ with intimidation and force, are actually traumatized, lethargic and helpless. In child education we have developed the empathy necessary to classify beating as insupportable. Our empathy should not end at the species barrier, but pass it.

Known TV trainers have been working with aids such as shock collars and choke collars, all of which are forbidden by law in Switzerland. The aim is described as "relaxed submission" and is apparently reached within minutes. What is seen in reality, however, are dogs that freeze as a reaction to fear or shut down completely (a state scientifically referred to as "learned helplessness"), i.e. states that are far from being a treatment or training success. Before buying books, show tickets etc, please inform yourself regarding these methods that are far from current scientific knowledge and often based on long expired theories - and make an informed decision on whether you really want to support this way of communicating with dogs.

We would like to invite you to have a look at some of the attached links, so you can create your own opinion. You might come to the conclusion that you do not want to support these methods based on physical force and/or psychological intimidation.

The selection of books and links to movies of training situations are meant to give you additional information on recent findings in behavior research and biology and on how this knowledge can be implemented in an approach to training that is successful and based on human-dog collaboration. Based on our own experience, we can assure you that knowing as much as possible about the dogs we share our lives with is not only worth it regarding training success, but also leads to a great deal of pleasure collaborating with them (and not against them). Finding a trainer who takes the same approach is a first step to mutual success.

As Gandhi already said, „the greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated“.

We can all contribute to this progress.

Initiative for force-free dog training (see annex for supporting professionals and organizations)

The supporting organizations of this initiative

www.forcefree-dogtraining.org/supporters/organsations/

The supporting professionals of this initiative

www.forcefree-dogtraining.org/supporters/professionals/

Code of conduct of the initiative

www.forcefree-dogtraining.org/force-free-trainers/code-of-conduct/

Video links that show force used in dog training (observe the dogs' body language)

www.forcefree-dogtraining.org/position-paper/videolinks

Reaction of professionals regarding aversive training techniques:

www.forcefree-dogtraining.org/position-paper/expert-reports

Reactions of the media regarding aversive training

www.forcefree-dogtraining.org/position-paper/media

And the most important:

Video links and information regarding non-aversive, scientifically based dog training

Articles

www.forcefree-dogtraining.org/force-free-training/articles

Books

www.forcefree-dogtraining.org/force-free-training/literature

Videos

www.forcefree-dogtraining.org/force-free-training/videos

Excerpts of the Swiss Animal Protection legislation (in German):

www.gewaltfreies-hundetraining.ch/positionspapier/auszuege-tschg

The most important content. Forbidden are in Switzerland and Austria:

- Choke collars
- Prong collars
- Electronic shock collars
- Tools with unpleasant acoustic signals or chemical agents.