



Shock Collars - Good or Bad?

Since every tool for training can be used for good or bad (depending on the person using it) the question should not be “Should Electric Collars Be Banned?” instead we should seek to punish those that abuse animals in any capacity.

There is much discussion on the issue of aversive training tools; at the top of that discussion is often the use of electric or “shock” collars. These collars, as described by their detractors, are a tool of evil and torture and are allegedly used only to inflict pain and suffering on an unknowing dog. These people cite abuse cases and cruelty cases to legitimize their claims.

As a behaviorist / trainer working with almost every breed and temperament of dog in both my private practice as well my work with shelters nationwide, I’d like to weigh in on the debate.

The use or “abuse” of shock collars is not any more prevalent today than it was years ago, what has changed is the quality of these collars and recently the use of positive training influences used in tandem with these collars. I will not call them shock collars because they are simply “electric collars.” Electricity can be used to light up a dark room and make it bright and it can be used to kill a man in an electric chair, it can be used to power a life-saving defibrillator or torture a person to death. How one uses the tool makes the difference, not the tool itself.

These collars only SHOCK when a person, who is unskilled (or cruel), abuses the device. The evolution of e-collars has drastically changed; the new devices are so precise in their delivery of a correction or stimuli that they have become one of the best training tools for the right trainer and the right situation. The collar correctly placed is set up under the chin of the dog and behind his ears (with the box under the chin) where a mild static shock produces an instantaneous reaction from the dog. Some will also place the box on the back of a dog’s neck for various reasons.

Contrary to popular belief the neck is *not* the most sensitive part of the dog; it is a strong resilient point on the dog that fairly and quickly derives a response from the direction of the handler.

Electric collar corrections are delivered as mild or as firm as the controller of the remote decides. There are no accidents, there is no grand electrical shock, it is a static shock that can be delivered milder than what you would feel dragging your feet along the carpet and touching something metal or another person. Often times these stimuli are much fairer to the dog than a yank on a collar.

Let's be clear, shock collars can be abusive, but I've seen much more abuse with other devices including, choke chains, pinch collars, sticks, hands as well as the ultimate tool of abuse – the human mind. To ban the use of any device *because it may* be used in an abusive manner is as ludicrous as removing trees from the sides of roads because they lead to death when people run into them. I've seen numerous dogs abused with devices such as halti's (collars that attach around the *head* of a dog). These collars can cause severe cervical injuries when dogs pull against them and the person at the other end of the leash either remains still or pulls the other way. Because the connection is on the face, the neck is not supported and the result can cause cervical injuries. Other collars include those that cinch up under the dog's legs when he pulls. So many new devices are invented in an effort to make dog training easier on people and inevitably crueler on dogs. The advent of these devices gives way to those who criticize training tools that, oftentimes, are simpler and less cruel to dogs.

A simple choke chain attached to a leash, some treats or a toy and a person with a sincere desire and understanding of dogs is still the simplest and often the best method for training. People who understand how dogs think and what makes them tick can use any tool properly, those who don't know this information can't.

So whether you are using a clicker and a halti or an e-collar; remember that cruelty is determined by the person, not the device. You can use a stick to tap a dog to get him into position or you can beat him with it, the decision remains on the handler, not the device. Should we ban the use of sticks (such as touch sticks)? Will we ban the use of leashes because people hit dogs with them?

Recent studies have show the amount of cortisol levels released in dogs is increased at a higher level through using of pinch collars over electric collars. I would imagine the reason for this is because the remote collar can be dialed down to exactly what the dog needs and the emotional stress on the dog from the handler's elevated frustration is removed. And, I wonder if these cortisol levels were measured when a dog receives nagging corrections on a flat collars if they wouldn't be higher.

I think rather than banning the use of e-collars we should condemn those that use them incorrectly as well as the abuse of any training method. In countries where the use of e-collars is banned, there is still widespread animal abuse. When one

device is taken away from someone with the likelihood to abuse it, this person will take another avenue to achieve an equally abusive result. Conversely, allowing the tools to be used by those qualified to use them keeps dogs safe and people responsible.

Using e-collars correctly can be a beneficial and very humane method of training a dog. Using the electric collar correctly delivers a milder correction with greater results than a yank on a leash with a flat collar, pinch collar, halti or any other collar. Many professionals use e-collars to polish training in places where a leash and regular collar can't reach: for example when a dog is at a great distance from the handler. Trainers use e-collars to *avoidance* train dogs against rattlesnakes as well as running out of open gates and potentially getting killed.

Anyone who seeks to ban the use of a training tool because they *feel* it is abusive without researching completely on the immense benefits that can be gained with such a tool is throwing out the baby with the bathwater. There truly are two sides to every story, and for the abuse I've witnessed on dogs in my work in shelters nationwide I feel there are a lot of things that I'd like to see banned before the electric collar.

Let's focus on the people using the tools, not the likelihood for their *potential* abuse. Let's look at the good that comes from various tools and spend our focus on finding those that abuse animals and punish them for their abuse. Let's give dogs a chance at fair training.

Since, in many situations, the animal is screwed because of human stupidity, it would be wiser for those that are overly concerned about a dog's welfare to spend their focus, time and resources helping animals in need. Allow those that train their dogs in a humane manner the tools and space to do so. There are thousands of dogs dying in shelters every day that would be happy to have a home where they are trained with electric collars.

Again, my point is not *if* electric collars are cruel, but how cruel the people are that abuse animals through poor training methods and most importantly; "*How cruel are people who don't train their dogs at all?*"

My position on this is simple, if people can use a tool in a fair and balanced method that is beneficial and not abusive to the dog – the tools should be available to them.

Dog training has inherent risks. I urge you to research and consult a professional for training advice.

<http://www.boundangels.org>

All writings are ©2013 Robert Cabral Bound Angels / Black Belt Dog Training
not to be reproduced without permission

