

# Harmful and Ineffective Training

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Numerous harmful techniques are used when teaching or “training” dogs. The techniques below not only fail to teach your dog an appropriate behavior, they also cause or aggravate behavioral problems such as fear, anxiety, aggression, reactivity, jumping, biting, and lack of attentiveness. The methods below are not based on valid learning principles or dog behavior.

Inappropriate training/teaching methods:

- Sticking your fingernail in a puppy’s tongue to stop play-biting.
- Pushing your puppy’s lip onto his or her tooth to stop play-biting.
- Sticking your finger down a dog’s throat to stop play-biting.
- Growling in a dog’s face is an aggressive affront and will make fearful dogs more fearful and reactive dogs more reactive. Dogs are sensitive to eye-contact. Growling at a dog is an ineffective way to teach or correct a dog, and can create detrimental side-effects.
- Staring down a dog is a direct threat. A dog may avoid confrontation and look away. Forcing a dog to look at you is abusive. Dogs should learn to trust eye-contact. Do not stare down a dog.
- Alpha rolling a dog will create aggression in dogs and make fearful dogs more fearful. Dogs do not grab dogs and throw them onto their backs. Some young or very submissive dogs willingly roll on their backs if they feel threatened or want to avoid conflict. Other dogs will not roll on their backs, but will give calming gestures instead. Parent wolves will push or nuzzle puppies onto their backs and then encourage the puppies to jump on their chests. This is a playful teaching gesture; not a correction or punishment. The “alpha roll” is a technique created by people pretending to be wolves, when neither wolves nor dogs exhibit this behavior.
- If you regularly yank or jerk on your dog’s neck, you are showing that you do not know how to teach your dog or are too lazy to do so. You are reacting poorly in response to what your dog is doing or do not know how to teach a more appropriate behavior. If you continuously yank or jerk on your dog’s collar or leash, your dog will be less responsive to you and less attentive.
- The use of choke chains and pinch collars is based on punishment and pain. There is no need to use such collars. Teach your dog kindly and humanely, understand how your dog learns, and both you and your dog will have a better relationship with each other.
- Kneeing a dog in the chest for jumping will not eliminate the behavior, and usually makes jumping worse. Jumping up is a submissive gesture usually exhibited in young submissive dogs and young energetic dogs.
- Stepping on a dog’s back paws will make jumping worse and will damage the relationship you have with your dog. It will make your dog more anxious around both you and visitors.
- Hitting your dog.

- Keeping your dog crated for over 4 hours a day to manage your dog's environment, instead of teaching your dog how to be left alone in the house.
- Shocking your dog.
- Yelling "No" at your dog when you failed to teach your dog proactively what it is you wanted.

Jumping, aggression, fear, anxiety and hyperactivity, reactivity and lack of attentiveness are often behaviors created by people and/or worsened by people. Be aware of what you teach your dog. Always teach your dog in a positive way.

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The following is excerpted from *Clinical Behavioral Medicine in Small Animals* by Dr. Karen Overall, V.M.D., Ph.D., 1997.

- ❖ The chin slap is not a species-appropriate form of communication. Dogs have no clue what it means, so it will not correct a behavior and may prompt the dog to self-protect and bite back.
- ❖ Damage caused by the scruff shake may parallel the cognitive damage caused by shaking a baby and results in increased activity levels and diminished attention. It makes training more difficult.
- ❖ Chaining or tying dogs make them more reactive. A dog who can't escape can only respond to negative stimuli by fighting.
- ❖ A review of electronic training collars indicated that all the dogs they were used on took longer to train than dogs taught without them and that the collars changed the dog's play behavior ( i.e., decreased the amount that they played).
- ❖ The alpha roll, or forcing a dog onto his back, is used by trainers to establish dominance but makes fearful dogs more fearful and escalates aggression in aggressive dogs. Subordinate dogs willingly offer this behavior along with other calming gestures and signals. The alpha roll is based on misunderstanding and myth in how dogs relate to each other.
- ❖ Hanging or "helicoptering" a dog by a choke chain and spinning him around by the leash causes brain damage and emotional changes, such as obsessive-compulsive disorders, increased generalized anxiety and fearful behaviors.
- ❖ Punishing a dog for what is not wanted, as opposed to teaching a dog what is desired and expected, is ineffective.