Evidence supports the use of reward-based methods for all canine training. AVSAB promotes interactions with animals based on compassion, respect, and scientific evidence. Based on these factors, reward-based learning offers the most advantages and least harm to the learner's welfare. Research supports the efficacy of reward-based training to address unwanted and challenging behaviors. There is no evidence that aversive training is necessary for dog training or behavior modification.

Reward-based techniques should be used for teaching common training skills as well as to address unwanted behaviors. The application of aversive methods – which, by definition, rely on application of force, pain, or emotional or physical discomfort – should not be used in canine training or for the treatment of behavioral disorders.

As the role of companion animals has evolved, their welfare and the relationships between humans and animals have become increasingly important. It is understood that animals are sentient and should be treated with respect and compassion.

Learning manners and skills can help animals to co-exist harmoniously with people in the home and in society. The techniques used to teach these manners and skills can strongly affect an animal's future behavior and emotional wellbeing.

Training methods are most effective when they focus on teaching the animal what to do, rather than punishing them for unwanted behaviors. Common training issues such as jumping, barking, and housetraining can be managed by arranging the environment appropriately and reinforcing desirable responses. More serious behavior concerns such as aggression, anxiety, and fear require a treatment plan that includes environmental management, behavior modification, and, in some cases, medication. Environmental conditions that drive the behavior should be addressed and the dog should be set up to make appropriate responses. Management can include avoiding situations that lead to the unwanted behavior and ensuring the safety of all involved.

Many methods of changing behavior in dogs are effective; however, the evidence-based veterinarian or behavior consultant should be concerned not just with what is effective but what does the least harm and produces the best long-term results. Current literature on dog training methods shows a clear advantage of reward-based methods over aversive-based methods with respect to immediate and long-term welfare, training effectiveness, and the dog-human relationship.

Exhaustive analyses of dog training literature have been completed and are available for review. A brief summary of the current evidence regarding canine training and some common questions about training techniques are addressed in this document.

**Detrimental Effects on Animal Welfare**

**Acute Effects**

In observational studies, dogs trained with aversive methods or tools showed stress-related behaviors during training, including tense body, lower body posture, lip licking, tail lowering, lifting front leg, panting, yawning, and yelping.

Dogs trained with reward-based methods showed increased attentiveness to their owner.

**Long-Term Effects**

Survey studies have shown an association between the use of aversive training methods and long-term behavior problems including aggressive behavior towards people and other dogs, and anxiety-related
behaviors such as avoidance and excitability. Survey studies cannot differentiate between causation and correlation, so possible explanations for this association include: 1) aversive training methods directly cause or contribute to the development of problem behaviors; or 2) owners of dogs with problem behaviors are more likely to use aversive training tools. Regardless of the explanation, this association shows that aversive training methods are not effective in eliminating problem behaviors: if they did, we would see the opposite trend of decreased behavior problems with increased use of aversive training. In contrast, dogs trained with reward-based methods have lower rates of behavior concerns compared with dogs trained with aversive methods.

Several studies show the effect of aversive training persists beyond the time of training. After dogs learned a cue taught using aversive training methods, they continued to show stress-related behaviors when the cue was presented, suggesting the cue itself had become aversive. In 2020, de Castro et al found that dogs trained with aversive methods were more ‘pessimistic’ on average compared to dogs trained using reward-based methods.

**Training Effectiveness**

Reward-based training methods have been shown to be more effective than aversive methods. Multiple survey studies have shown higher obedience in dogs trained with reward based methods. Hiby et al (2004) found that obedience levels were highest for dogs trained exclusively with reward-based methods and lowest for dogs trained exclusively with aversive-based methods. Dogs trained with a combination of rewards and aversive-based methods (often referred to as ‘balanced’ in the dog training industry) produced lower obedience levels than reward-based but better than exclusively aversive-based training. Aversive training has been shown to impair dogs’ ability to learn new tasks.

**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

**What are some examples of techniques that may be used by a reward-based trainer?**

Trainers may use verbal or visual cues to signal (request) the required behavior, a clicker or verbal marker to mark the behavior, and toys, treats, or other appropriate reinforcers to reward the behavior. Capturing, shaping, and luring may be used to teach desired behaviors.

**Does reward-based training mean that dogs are allowed to do unwanted behaviors?**

Use of reward-based methods does not mean dogs are allowed to do anything they want. All animals learn best when given appropriate structure, routine, and guidelines. However, it is imperative that these boundaries be taught without the use of fear, intimidation, or pain.

**Are aversive training techniques appropriate for animals who exhibit aggression?**

Animals with challenging behavior disorders such as aggression should be treated with effective, compassionate, and humane methods of training, rather than with “a heavy hand”. There are no exceptions to this standard. If a trainer is having difficulty modifying a particular behavior, they should consult with another reward-based trainer, or refer to a veterinarian, board-certified veterinary behaviorist, or certified applied animal behaviorist.

**What techniques should be avoided in training?**

An appropriate trainer should avoid any use of training tools that involve pain (choke chains, prong collars, or electronic shock collars), intimidation (squirt bottles, shaker noise cans, compressed air cans, shouting, staring, or forceful manipulation such as “alpha rolls” or “dominance downs”), physical correction techniques (leash jerking, physical force), or flooding (“exposure”). The learner must always feel safe and have the ability to “opt out” of training sessions. All efforts should be made to communicate effectively and respectfully with the learner.

**Why should aversive training techniques be avoided?**

The consequences and fallout from aversive training methods have been proven and are well documented. These include increased anxiety and fear-related aggression, avoidance, and learned helplessness. Animals may be less motivated to engage in training and less likely to interact with human members of the household.

**How should a veterinarian decide who to refer to for training?**

Veterinarians offering training referrals should recommend the most qualified and ethical trainers. The trainers should be certified, humane, and effective. Whenever possible, veterinarians should interview and observe a trainer’s methods before recommending them to clients. If a trainer is observed using aversive training methods or if a trainer discusses out-dated ideas such as...
chasing. In dogs with a history of off-leash behavior problems, China et al (2020) found no difference in the proportion of disobeyed cues between dogs trained with electronic shock collars by manufacturer-nominated trainers compared with reward-based training.17 Dogs trained with reward-based methods in this study had a shorter delay before responding than the group trained with electronic shock collars.17

Effects on Dog-Human Relationship

Reward-based methods promote a strong, positive bond between dog and owner. Rooney and Cowan (2011) found dogs who were trained with aversive methods were less likely to interact with a stranger during relaxed social play.18 Dogs trained using physical punishment were also less likely to interact with their owner during play.18 Viera de Castro et al (2019) found that dogs who attended reward-based training schools played more in the presence of their owner than in the presence of a stranger; they also followed and greeted the owner more than a stranger.16 Dogs trained with reward-based methods were shown to gaze towards their owners more frequently during training.3

Physiologic Measures of Stress

Cortisol is the most commonly evaluated biomarker of stress in dogs. Interpreting cortisol studies can be difficult because cortisol levels increase with both positive and negative emotional arousal. Cortisol increases both with positive emotional states (eustress) and negative emotional states (distress).20 Therefore, interpretation of cortisol level can be difficult and should be done along with behavioral responses.31

De Castro et al (2020) found that dogs trained using aversive methods had higher elevations in cortisol compared to dogs trained using reward-based methods.4 This higher cortisol level correlated with more stress-related behaviors (lip-licking, yawning) and more time spent tense and panting during training in the aversive training group compared to the reward-based training group.4

Addressing Problem Behaviors Without the Use of Aversive Methods

Behavior modification plans should include science-based classical or operant

“dominance”, “leader of the pack”, or “alpha” theories, then clients should be advised against hiring them.

Trainers with backgrounds in higher-level education such as the Karen Pryor Academy and Jean Donaldson’s Academy for Dog Trainers, as well as involvement in organizations such as the Pet Professional Guild, International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants, Victoria Stillwell’s Academy for Dog Training, and Fear-Free Certifications should be recommended whenever possible.

What is the role of the veterinarian in behavioral care?

Veterinarians are an important part of the training or behavior team. Incorporating behavior history and assessments in every patient visit encourages early intervention for problem behaviors. The veterinarian also plays an important role in evaluating the health of the animal to determine if there are medical factors contributing to the behavior concern. After the health evaluation the veterinarian can determine if they have the skills and desire to create a behavior treatment plan or if they prefer to partner with a behavior consultant or trainer. Veterinarians creating behavior treatment plans or partnering with other professionals for the treatment of behavior concerns should not consider the use of pharmaceuticals as a “last resort” for behavior problems. Open communication with board-certified veterinary behaviorists and members of AVSAB is encouraged.

Glossary of Terms

A glossary of training and behavior modification terms can be found on the AVSAB website at: http://avsab.org/glossary

Recommended Reading List

1. Decoding Your Dog (American College of Veterinary Behaviorists)
2. Decoding Your Cat (American College of Veterinary Behaviorists)
3. From Fearful to Fear Free (Dr. Marty Becker, Dr. Lisa Radosta, Dr. Wailani Sung, Mikkel Becker)
5. Puppy Start Right (Dr. Kenneth Martin and Debbie Martin)
6. The Power of Positive Dog Training (Pat Miller)
7. Don’t Shoot the Dog! (Karen Pryor)
8. How to Behave So Your Dog Behaves (Dr. Sophia Yin)
9. The Other End of the Leash (Patricia McConnell)
10. Control Unleashed: Reactive to Relaxed (Leslie McDevitt)
11. Animal Training: Successful Animal Management through Positive Reinforcement (Ken Ramirez)

Additional resources

2. https://www.petprofessionalguild.com/shockcollars
conditioning protocols. There is no role for aversive training in behavior modification plans. Creating positive associations to stimuli perceived by the dog as frightening is essential in easing fear and anxiety. Teaching new skills can build confidence and provide the animal with alternative patterns of behavior that are more compatible with life in our homes and neighborhoods. Systematic desensitization (as opposed to flooding or exposure plans) involves very gradual exposure to the stimulus in a way that keeps the dog feeling safe at all times. Positive reinforcement of appropriate behavior helps the animal student learn while keeping them engaged in the process.

Management strategies, including antecedent arrangement, have a vital role in dog training and should be considered in all training and behavior modification plans. Medication may also be necessary for serious behavior problems such as fear, aggression, separation anxiety, noise phobia, or compulsive disorders. These individuals should always be evaluated by a veterinarian so that an accurate diagnosis and treatment plan can be made and medical conditions that may contribute to the problem can be excluded.

**Conclusion**

Based on current scientific evidence, AVSAB recommends that only reward-based training methods are used for all dog training, including the treatment of behavior problems. Aversive training methods have a damaging effect on both animal welfare and the human-animal bond. There is no evidence that aversive methods are more effective than reward-based methods in any context. AVSAB therefore advises that aversive methods should not be used in animal training or for the treatment of behavior disorders.

**REFERENCES**

AVSAB MEMBER HIGHLIGHT

Dr. Brian Bourquin

Dr. Brian Bourquin became interested in behavior through his academic advisor at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, Dr. Katherine Houpt, VMD, PhD. Dr. Bourquin is not pursuing an advanced degree in behavior, but he wants to spread the message that you don’t need to be a specialist to make a life changing impact!

Prevention and early intervention are his focus. His hospital, Boston Veterinary Clinic, takes a proactive stance on recommending positive reinforcement trainers by name in new puppy kits and performs behavior screening to detect concerns early. He works closely with their Behavior Resident and starts emergency medication if there is a patient that cannot wait to get in. This partnership extends behavioral care to as many patients as possible.

He strives for a healthy work-life balance. “When I am run down and tired, I unplug for the night, so I get a good night’s sleep and am ready to start the next day with all I have! As simple as it may sound, helping others still brings meaning to my journey.” Seeing healing in action keeps him going. “The success of a case that goes well, a client understanding why you make certain recommendations and following them, or just answering all 100 questions a
new puppy or kitten pet parent has, there is nothing like it!” Dr. Bourquin encourages those new to behavior to build a good support system. “There are going to be tough times, but if your family and/or friends have your back, it all becomes manageable.”

Thank you Dr. Bourquin!

Did you know you can expand your behavioral network by adding “friends” on our website?

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Expand Your Behavior Knowledge

**Blog Highlights**

We’ve recently expanded our authorship to bring you EVEN MORE of the latest behavior topics!

Can We Keep Our Cats Warm Enough?

**Dr. Mikel Maria Delgado** discusses how to keep your furry feline in their thermoneutral zone. [more >]

Scaredy Dogs and Strangers Part 1 [more >]

Scaredy Dogs and Strangers Part 2 [more >]

With isolation and the pandemic, this is an important read on understanding and interacting with dogs who are fearful of strangers, by **Dr. Jen Summerfield**.

If Your Dog Is Afraid, Avoid These Two Mistakes

**by Zazie Todd**, PhD details two common pitfalls in working with fearful dogs—and how to avoid them. [more >]

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**FORUM POSTS** - Join the Conversation!

We are excited to announce that we have made the move to Groups.io for all our future forum discussions! By now, all Members should have
received an invitation, via email, to join. If you have not received an invitation, please reach out at your earliest convenience.

POST A NEW QUESTION on AVSAB’s forum by visiting the forum, or by emailing directly from your own inbox. Start a new question or comment on the questions, concerns and cases of other behavior-oriented individuals, and help us get the community talking! The forum is available to AVSAB members only.

Need help accessing the new forum? Contact us.

TECHNICIANS CORNER

We are looking for an avid behavior-oriented technician who might be interested in sharing SVBT updates and technician-focused behavior information. Contact Gage Houser for more information.

TRainers RING by Juliana Willems CPDT-KA, KPA CTP

Hi again everyone, and Happy New Year! In an attempt to be optimistic that 2021 will bring more normalcy than 2020 did, I’m going to share information on something that has been on every dog owner’s mind since this pandemic started: acclimating our dogs to being left alone again.

While it’s unclear how much all this time together will impact dogs who were previously fine with being left alone before the pandemic, there is no doubt some of these puppies and rescue dogs who were brought home during the pandemic lockdown and know nothing but 24/7 time with their owners are going to struggle.

Here are some resources you, your friends, or your clients can use to both prevent or treat separation distress and anxiety:

- **Certified Separation Anxiety Trainers** – CSATs are one of the best resources because they are truly experts in this behavior issue
- **Veterinary Behaviorists** – If you think you have a dog with severe separation anxiety (destruction when left alone, house soiling, excessive vocalizing, etc.), meeting with a vet behaviorist can be critical
- **‘Mission: Possible’** – An online course for dog owners
- **“I’ll Be Home Soon”** by Patricia McConnell – A quick and owner-friendly book

Separation anxiety is one of the most challenging behavior issues to address, so working with an experienced certified trainer is important. Trainers are urging pet owners to start preparing now for the inevitable return back to real life. As they say, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure!

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**Upcoming Behavior Seminars and Conferences**

Did you know as a new Member Benefit, you can request to have your regional seminars, lectures and conferences added to the AVSAB website calendar? For more information on how to add your event, click here!

- **FREE LIVE Webinar from Vet Vine and Family Paws Parent Education!** March 8, 2021, 8PM Eastern - Crawling Babies, Conflicted Dogs: 5 Ways to Decrease Heartbreaking Dilemmas in
Conflicted Dogs: 5 Ways to Decrease Heartbreaking Dilemmas in Your Practice
Veterinary professionals are providers of public health. They see families and their dogs on a daily basis; families who are seeking guidance on the best way to prevent problems and maximize welfare. Veterinary professionals are uniquely poised to provide client education for child-dog safety. This webinar provides an excellent opportunity to gain insight from experts as well as develop techniques that can make an immediate difference. The content will be relevant and practical for every veterinary professional who communicates to clients with children. Approval pending by AAVSB RACE.

Check out the ACVB webinars including information on behavior supplements (including CBD), pain-management, and dog bites to children—with many more topics to come. Get more information here.

AVSAB/UCD Webinar Series

- **Top 10 Behavioral Tips You Can Implement Today** (Dr. Melissa Bain, DACVB). View on-demand anytime for FREE.
- **Low Stress = High Satisfaction** (Dr. Sally Foote, DACVB) Click here to sign up.
- **Use of Psychotropic Medication and Alternatives** (Dr. Liz Stelow, DACVB) Click here to sign up.

Other Continuing Education

- **Fear Free℠** continuing education available ongoing
- **Low Stress Handling** continuing education available ongoing

Get the Latest Behavior Updates

President’s Message

Dear Members:

Welcome to a new year! The board has been very busy the past 3 months and we are excited about all the updates we have coming your way. We’ve updated the forums, finalized a new position statement, decided to offer access to the Journal of Veterinary Behavior to all members, and worked out the details of the previously approved dues increase. I am excited to have a forum with more functionality and reliability. We will use the Groups.io listserv to send out the new position statement for a member preview.

Beginning January 1st of 2022 all AVSAB members will have online access to the Journal of Veterinary Behavior as a benefit of membership! This is so exciting but did come with a few hiccups to figure out. Since the JVB runs on a calendar year schedule, we will be transitioning from an anniversary date membership year to a calendar year membership. For this year we will prorate the $50/year membership dues for the number of months remaining in 2021 at the time of your renewal. Toward the end of the year you
of months remaining in 2021 at the time of your renewal. Toward the end of the year, you will receive a renewal notice for 2022 dues in the amount of US$95. If you have any questions, please reach out to us.

I hope you are all staying healthy and safe and looking forward to 2021.

Ashley Elzerman, DVM, DACVB, AVSAB President

Board and Committee Member Updates

AVSAB-SVBT Clinical Behavior Conference: Gage Houser, AVSAB Executive Director

Planning for the 2021 Clinical Animal Behavior Conference is underway and we cannot wait to see everyone in October. It was decided at the last committee meeting that we will be going virtual this year! Our next committee meeting is set for February, where we will discuss our virtual platform options.

Website: Gage Houser, AVSAB Executive Director

AVSAB is continuing to make updates to their website in order to build a better members experience. We’d like to thank you in advance for your patience with our ongoing updates. If you have any questions, please visit our support page or contact us.

AVSAB Position Statements: Lynn Honeckman DVM

The position statement committee has sent the new updated punishment-based training statement for formatting and is looking forward to presenting it to the membership.

Diplomate Department: Dr. E'Lise Christensen, DVM DACB, Secretary ACVB

This winter, the ACVB has been organizing the next Veterinary Behavior Symposium (VBS) meeting as well as launching a new webinar series available to veterinarians, trainers, and the public.

VBS will be held virtually again this year, and I will be sure to get the final details out to AVSAB when they are available.

Our first ACVB webinars covered behavior supplements (including the ever-popular CBD), pain-management, and dog bites to children, and we have many more topics to come. Get more information here.

Thinking about doing a residency? Have other questions about ACVB? Reach out to our wonderful Executive Director, Betsy Grenier.

Resident Rounds: Lori Rockwell, DVM

As always, the residents have been busy this quarter—stay tuned for updates from the residents in our next newsletter!
Take Advantage of Your Membership

AVSAB Membership: Gage Houser, AVSAB Executive Director

Did you know as a Member of AVSAB, you can take advantage of a variety of discounts? Become a member today!

Until January 2022, AVSAB Members are eligible for deeply discounted subscription rates of only $30/year for online (electronic) access, or just $45/year for both print and online access—and after this, subscription will be included in membership. For more information on the currently discounted rate, visit [here](#).

VetVine is an online resource for veterinary professionals and pet parents, which offers access to webinars, publications and other excellent information to its membership.

Dogwise

10% savings on books produced by Dogwise.

WILEY

25% savings on books published by Wiley.

Neuroscience Education Institute

Discounted one year membership for continuing education, provided to professionals working in mental health.

New Member Benefits include free listing of job positions and upcoming Regional Seminars, Lectures and Conferences on the AVSAB Website!

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

**NEW POSITION** - Behavior Vets is growing! We are excited to announce Associate Veterinarian positions open to either DACVBs, veterinarians interested in pursuing residencies with the American College of Behaviorists, or veterinarians with a special interest in behavior. Behavior Vets is located in Castle Pines, CO and Westchester, NY. Please contact [info@behaviorvets.com](mailto:info@behaviorvets.com), ATTN: Laura Rhodes.

Opportunities for vets and technicians can be found [here](#).
Have a position available for a veterinarian or technician? Post in the AVSAB Forum to have it listed in next quarter’s newsletter.

The Next Generation of Leaders in Behavior

By Louisa Beal DVM

Members of the student liaison committee have been discussing how we might adapt student requirements and student outreach to better meet the changing learning environment of veterinary students.

- Do you need a veterinarian who is well versed in various behavior topics for your next Continuing Education Seminar? Then check out the AVSAB Speakers Bureau! More >

- Need a behavior rotation? More >

- Does your school have an official student chapter (SCAVSAB)? More >

- Do you want a student chapter (SCAVSAB)? More >

- Why should you join SCAVSAB? More >

General Information

NEWSLETTER NOTES by Kayla Bilsborrow, DVM

It has been a pleasure working with AVSAB and the newsletter—thank you to those who have written for, and read, the newsletter, and best of luck to the future newsletter coordinator!

Did you know that subscribing to the newsletter is free? Please feel free to share the link on your personal or professional social media sites to encourage more subscribers and members!

ADVERTISE IN THIS NEWSLETTER!

For information on placing a product ad in future editions of the newsletter, please contact Gage Houser. Pricing Information

CONTACT INFORMATION
If you have any reviews, links, or continuing education opportunities that you would like to have included in future newsletters, please send that information to Gage Houser for consideration.