



# Types of dog trainer

AND HOW TO FIND THE ONE THAT'S RIGHT FOR YOU

# Broadly speaking, there are 4 types of trainers.

**Type 1 trainers, or Aversive Trainers** use mostly negative reinforcement or punishment to teach dogs certain behaviours. You may also find them listed as using “alpha” or “dominance” training.

**Type 2, or Balanced Trainers** who use both negative and positive reinforcement - both punishment and reward to teach dogs how to behave the way they want. Also known as “balanced” trainers, they may describe themselves as using all quadrants of operant conditioning

**Type 3, or Positive Reinforcement Trainers** use solely positive reinforcement to teach the behaviours that they want. Also known as force free, or r+ trainers.

**Type 4, or Concept Trainers** are also positive reinforcement trainers, but they teach dogs concepts rather than solely focusing on individual behaviours.

At Skyhardt, and Kindness Cafe, we work solely with type 3 and 4 trainers, and heavily encourage all of the people that we talk to, to carefully consider the types of trainer they work with.



## Type 1 trainers have seen a rise in popularity

Cesar Millan is one of the most prominent examples of an aversive (type 1) trainer who teaches “dominance” or “alpha theory” to his clients. Type one trainers focus heavily on punishing the behaviours they do not want to see in a dog - for example: When training a dog not to bark it is common to use a shock collar and punish the dog with an electric shock every time the dog barks, or a prong collar to “correct” the dog whenever it does the undesired behaviour (in this case, the correction is a hard tug on the lead so that the prongs of the collar cause the dog pain).

Balanced trainers (type 2 trainers) use the methods above, but also use positive reinforcement - rewarding the good or desirable behaviours from the dog. Many balanced trainers argue that using all four quadrants of operant conditioning is the most scientific and well-rounded approach to dog training. Balanced trainers often argue that their method is one of the quickest ways to train a dog, and the most effective.



## Positive reinforcement trainers do not punish dogs

Type 3, positive reinforcement trainers, do not punish dogs. They reward only the behaviours that they want to see, and redirect or avoid undesirable behaviours from dogs. Rather than, for example, punish a dog for barking, they reward the dog for being quiet. Rather than using leash corrections to punish a dog for pulling, they use rewards for the dog not pulling. The training is almost always focussed on resolving specific and identified behaviours.

Type 4, concept trainers work in a manner similar to positive reinforcement trainers, but rather than training only specific behaviours, they teach dogs concepts that apply to other behaviours and situations in their life. A concept trainer will absolutely teach a dog not to bark, but will do so by teaching the dog concepts such as disengagement and calmness, so that multiple behaviours improve, not just the single target behaviour. It is true that concept training (and positive reinforcement training in general) can take longer, but it is important to understand the ways in which punishment can hinder future training.

# What do they do?

TYPES THREE AND FOUR



Operant conditioning is a method of learning that uses rewards and punishments to modify behaviour.

	<b>+</b> Positive	<b>-</b> Negative
<b>Reinforcement</b>	<p><b>Positive reinforcement:</b> A positive stimulus is added to encourage the desired behaviour</p> <p>Treats, toys and playing games and other things your dog finds fun</p>	<p><b>Negative reinforcement:</b> An aversive stimulus is taken away to reinforce the desired behaviour</p> <p>Stopping a bad sound, or sensation e.g. bark collars or "invisible fences", relieving leash pressure</p>
<b>Punishment</b>	<p><b>Positive punishment:</b> An aversive stimulus is added to decrease unwanted behaviour</p> <p>Lead corrections, pain, prong collars etc</p>	<p><b>Negative punishment:</b> A positive stimulus is taken away to decrease unwanted behaviour</p> <p>Taking away toys, access to people, "time out" etc.</p>



# What is operant conditioning

AND IS IT STILL RELEVANT?

Positive reinforcement seeks to reward desired behaviours. For dogs, this can be as simple as giving them a treat when they sit. It doesn't have to be food based rewards (although that is the easiest and most reliable reward to give), it can be verbal praise, a toy that the dog likes, a few seconds of running. Essentially anything your dog likes can be a reward.

Negative reinforcement takes away an aversive stimulus when your dog does what you ask them to do. This can be turning off a shock on a collar when your dog sits, releasing pressure on the collar and lead when your dog stops pulling, or even something like stopping an uncomfortable noise when your dog does as you ask it to do. The key here is that something your dog doesn't like stops happening when it does what you ask of it.

Negative punishment takes away something nice when your dog doesn't do as you ask it. This could be taking away a bowl of food, or a favourite toy or chew. The main idea is that something nice goes away when your dog exhibits undesirable behaviour.

Positive punishment seeks to punish the dog if your dog fails to do what you ask of it. This could be something like using a shock on a collar to punish the dog for not recalling to you, or doing a collar "pop" (a hard tug on the dog's collar). The emphasis on positive punishment is that you're adding an aversive (something a dog dislikes and/or finds painful) stimulus when the dog does something undesirable.



# positive negative punishment reward

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

## Punishment is bad

Bluntly put, punishing dogs causes trauma. Dogs do not, as a rule, have the cognitive capacity to understand why they are being punished, and will try absolutely anything to make the punishment stop. In scientific studies of dogs that were exposed to a painful stimulus (electric shock), the behaviour they learned to do to make the stimulus stop carried on long past the time the stimulus was applied.

In one specific experiment, dogs were taught to move from one place to another when an electric shock was applied. The dogs continued to do that for an average of 600 more times even when the shock wasn't applied. That's great, you might think! The dog successfully learned a new behaviour, and the behaviour persisted even after the punishment stopped, that's just what we want!

Except that the dog also learned fear and stress. The reason that the dog continues to perform the unexpected behaviour is because it anticipates that it will be hurt. Each time it performs the behaviour, its cortisol levels rise, and the dog feels fear. You might think that's not too bad, it's a worthwhile price to pay for teaching my dog to sit when I ask it. Except that it isn't. Cortisol (the stress hormone) stays in a dog's system for up to 72 hours after an aversive or stressful event. How many times a day do you ask your dog to sit? How many times a day do you ask your dog to perform other tasks? How many times a day do you frighten your dog?

# But why is punishment bad?

AND WHAT DO WE DO INSTEAD?



Every dog, even the best trained dog, has a limit.

What we also know is that every dog has a limit. Every dog can only tolerate a certain amount of cortisol in its system before it starts to exhibit negative or undesirable behaviours in an attempt to self-regulate. In otherwise happy and healthy dogs, this can manifest as barking, lunging and snapping. In dogs who anticipate punishment and who regularly live in fear, this can manifest in significantly worse ways - in biting, destruction and even in killing.

What's worse is that this type of training takes effect very quickly, which is often used as a selling point. What the negative reinforcement trainers aren't telling, or perhaps don't even know themselves, is that those dogs aren't learning to make good choices. Those dogs are acting on fear and instinct, which can result in very different behaviour choices. A dog operating on fear will repeat the same behaviour over and over even if it causes them harm. A dog who has been trained with positive reinforcement will be much more capable of making safer choices for itself and is likely to be more capable of intelligent disobedience.

A photograph of a brown dog, possibly a Weimaraner, sitting on a wooden bucket. The dog has large, upright ears and is looking directly at the camera with a slightly open mouth. The background is a solid dark brown color. The text 'Every dog has a limit' is overlaid in large white font across the middle of the image, and 'SEE ALSO: BUCKETS' is at the bottom.

**Every dog  
has a limit**

SEE ALSO: BUCKETS



## Suddenly, choosing the right trainer seems much more important

We already know that trainers who use words like “alpha”, “dominance”, and “corrections” aren’t going to be the best choice for our dogs, but there are some questions you can ask to find out if a trainer is going to be a good fit for you:

1: what happens when my dog gets it wrong

We can find out whether the trainer will use any punishment.

2: what happens when my dog gets it right

We find out if the trainer uses rewards.

3: what equipment do I need to use for dog training

We find out if the trainer will recommend aversives like prong collars and e-collars

4: what happens if my dog gets stressed out during training

We find out what the trainers knows about stress in dogs, and whether they think it’s appropriate to flood or push through it.

5: What experience and/or education do you have about dogs and dog training

It’s useful to know that in the UK there isn’t any legislation about who can describe themselves as a dog trainer. Any Joe Bloggs can set himself up as a trainer legally, with no education or experience.



# Finding a good fit

PART 1

6: what happens if my dog has a problem you cannot solve  
We find out whether this trainer is prepared to refer you on to someone more knowledgeable and to admit when you have a problem they can't solve.

7: what kind of guarantee do you offer  
Anyone who offers a 100% guarantee is to be avoided. Nobody can guarantee that a dog will be 100% perfectly trained, ever. Anyone who says they can is lying to you.

As a company if we are unable to train your dog, we exclusively offer referrals to local trainers who use force free methods. You don't have to work with the trainer you met on the day, but every trainer you meet will be able to refer you onwards to someone who will help you to train your dog in a force free, kind, and ethical way.

**We will never knowingly cause harm to you or your dog.**



# Finding a good fit

PART 2, AND OUR  
PROMISE

# About Us

## SKYHARDT DOG TRAINING

Skyhardt dog training is run by Kate Keen and Deanna Midnight, who became friends in 2015 whilst running conventions together. Dee got a dog in 2017, and started out learning how to train him to be an assistance dog. Kate got a husky shortly after in 2018, because she didn't think her life had enough chaos in it. They've both been learning and training together since, getting their first qualifications in 2019, beginning work with clients in 2020, and continuing their education and practice constantly since.

### Pay what you feel:

If you'd like to support Kate and Dee, and make more sessions and ebooks like this one possible, please donate, and support us on social media.



[@skyhardtdogs](https://www.instagram.com/skyhardtdogs)



[Skyhardt Dog Training](https://www.facebook.com/SkyhardtDogTraining)



[training.skyhardt.co.uk](https://training.skyhardt.co.uk)



[Patreon](https://www.patreon.com/skyhardtdogs)

[Our paypal](#)

