

POSITION STATEMENT ON HUMANE DOG TRAINING

Within this document the terms “positive” and “negative” are used in a mathematical sense, that is to literally mean the addition or removal of something.

“Reinforcement” or a “reinforcer” refers to anything that increases the likelihood of a behavior, while “punishment” refers to something that decreases the likelihood of a behavior.

At EQ dogs we heavily rely on, and/or exclusively train through the use of positive reinforcement via food rewards, play, or through the environment. This will also lead us to the inevitable use of negative punishment by withholding these reinforcers. We use a bridge in the form of a sound, typically a clicker, but also the words “yes”, “good” etc. to mark correct behaviors or choices the dog makes. This teaches him to expect a reward when he hears these markers, and to either continue or end the behavior he is being rewarded for. We may also train a “No Reward Marker” (NRM), to indicate to the dog that he did not meet the criteria for reinforcement, and to get ready to try again. We usually use a verbal cue such as “oops” or “try again.” We like the term “Least Intrusive Minimally Aversive” (LIMA), to describe our approach in most cases.

When and where we use positive punishment to train pet dogs, either through the use of a pinch collar or electronic collar, is determined by the potential outcomes or danger presented by the dog. This could be either to himself, other animals, or people within his environment. No trainer at EQ dogs will ever employ the use of positive punishment or negative reinforcement without the written consent and permission of the dog’s owner.

We strongly believe in advocacy and agency for all. A trainer that violates this belief is not in line with EQ dogs’ ethics or policies on transparency.

We believe in humane training methods. Not just for the animals, but also for the people directly involved in the animal’s care and routine handling.

At EQ dogs we prioritize quality of life for people and their dogs. We want to achieve that higher quality of life as quickly as possible within realistic and humane timelines.

Example 1: In a potential case where the dog is causing harm to himself by pawing and biting at his crate, until he escapes or injures himself, we would choose to end this behavior as quickly as possible, with the least amount of room for error. The quickest way may be through positive punishment via an electronic collar correction. A trainer may recommend this, but only if the owner of the dog gives consent for its use. From there, with the self harming behavior reduced, we would begin to set the foundation for safer behavior using less intrusive methods. We do this because we prefer not to risk potentially prolonging any harm to the dog by beginning a protocol that will likely take significant time to resolve the problematic behavior. In our opinion, the most humane option would be to extinguish this self injurious behavior as quickly as possible, to reduce the chances the dog will harm himself again.

Example 2: A large dog that pulls on the leash, whose behaviors have resulted in injuries to his senior owners. We would use positive punishment to resolve the leash pulling as quickly as possible to get the dog back to having regular exercise, and restoring the owner’s agency and safety. From there, a less intrusive training plan can safely begin without further restricting or limiting the dog’s access to exercise. We would find this to be more humane than limiting or heavily structuring walks while the dog learns safe behaviors, due to the potentially significant amount of time that could take. This could depend on a number of variables; the owner’s ability to follow through consistently, lack of dedication, physical inability, successful or unsuccessful reinforcement of safe behaviors, or whether the dog has generalized the new safe



behavior to all locations, or just the place(s) he was trained in.

There are many schools of thought in the dog training field, with numerous talented trainers from every methodology that succeed in training the same behaviors.

We are “science-based” in the way that all learning is; it is up to you to determine what science you’d like in your toolbox, and apart from direct misuse or cruelty, there is no right or wrong choice.

We believe that each quadrant of operant conditioning as it is defined (positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, positive punishment, and negative punishment), is only a piece of your dog’s puzzle. While vitally important when we want to influence it, the brain cannot be fully understood through only the four quadrants of operant conditioning. There are numerous factors that influence an individual’s behavior, including but not limited to: their environment, traumatic events, genetics, their early life experiences, and even the wide and complicated array of emotions they possess. Emotions such as fear, frustration, or even excitement; many of which can be interwoven.

You have a right to choose a dog trainer whose methods you are fully aware of, comfortable with, and most importantly:

methods you have knowingly consented to learning.



To quote renowned animal trainer, Bob Bailey: "Pavlov is always on your shoulder."

This of course refers to classical conditioning, or the famous study of Pavlov's dogs who salivated involuntarily upon hearing a bell ring. We cannot remove classical conditioning from any equation where learning is involved. How the dogs we train feel is extremely important to us. We want our dogs to be happy, relaxed, or appropriately excited. We want to limit uncomfortable feelings as much as possible for people and dogs. Though we know that sometimes being confused or a little stressed can be a normal part of the learning process, when it is controlled and not overwhelming.

We place as much emphasis on how you and your dog feel while training, as we do making sure you both achieve your goals. Emotions play a huge role in how we interact with our environment and the people in it, and it is no different for your dog.

A five year old child will not successfully learn to read in a haunted house. While comparatively, an overly stressed dog will not successfully learn to use productive behaviors (or at least, not the ones we want them to) in an environment they perceive to be a haunted house. The aforementioned, is also a question of ethics and what is fair and humane to the learner.

We do not practice through methods or speech, any aspect of "dominance theory."

We do not use terminology that suggests your dog has (or is capable of forming) organized plans of achieving social dominance. Terms such as "pack leader/leader", "alpha/alpha dog", "top dog", etc. are not used on our website, promotional materials, in print, or by our trainers.

We prefer to use language that refers to your dog as a partner, rather than an adversary. We feel this better represents how we train dogs; as a collaborative effort between both species to better understand each other, so that we may share a mutually rewarding existence.

Regardless of tool, marker, or quadrant of operant conditioning used, EQ dogs is dedicated to training happy and healthy dogs who, at the end of their training plans, are not displaying stress behaviors in excess. These might manifest as lip licking, shaking off, scratching, yawning, "whale eye" where the dog looks sideways revealing the white sclera of the eye, breaking away during sessions to drink excessively, run with their tail/butt tucked under (often called "zoomies"), or walking with their head lowered etc. Among other behaviors that may indicate stress or avoidance within the context of a training session.

At EQ dogs we strive to train dogs that are willing participants in their own learning.

Dogs that are safely allowed to make choices, mistakes, and explore their options tend to be much more inquisitive and receptive learners. We allow dogs to tell us when something we're asking is too much, too hard, or too confusing.

Our dogs can opt out or into training with us through the use of a trained cue, usually a word like "ready?" This asks the dog to indicate a willingness to work (barking excitedly, jumping/bouncing, tail wagging, searching for their toy or food, or other behaviors that show engagement) to earn reinforcement.

If the dog does not display the attitude for learning that we want, we retrace our steps in the training plan to figure out what went wrong, where, and how we can encourage the dog to become a willing participant in the training process.

About EQ dogs

We are a progressive dog training business located in Saint Cloud, Minnesota owned by lead trainer & Founder, Ryleigh Mars.

EQ dogs offers training services to the general public, dog enthusiasts, and (sometimes) their cats.



you can reach out to us via email at
wedontbite@eqdogs.com
or through our website
www.eqdogs.com