

# Position Statement

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## on Training Methods

### Aversive Stimuli

The Academy recognizes that, in most jurisdictions, dog training is unregulated. Practitioners range from those with formal education and credentials to those who are entirely self-proclaimed, taking money for hire without any formal training and using virtually any method, including electric shock, collars that strangle, collars that dig pins into dogs' necks, striking dogs and a wide range of interventions designed to frighten, startle and intimidate dogs.

It is The Academy's position that consumers be extremely wary in this landscape and hire only trainers with formal training and who do not employ aversive stimuli of any kind in their training and behavior modification.

Credentials to look for include CTC, PCBC-A, KPA-CTP, PMCT, CDBC, Dip. ABST, CPDT and university degrees in relevant subjects. Zazie Todd PhD's Companion Animal Psychology has an excellent blog post on [how to choose a dog trainer](#).

The Academy applauds professional organizations that require credentialing, however disagrees with the philosophy some organizations support, framed as Least Intrusive Minimally Aversive (LIMA) hierarchies of technique selection. Such hierarchies allow for the use of aversive stimuli (negative reinforcement and positive punishment) if all other means have been exhausted. The Academy does not support LIMA or similar hierarchies



because it has become clear in both the literature and clinical settings that aversive stimuli are unnecessary, inhumane, and very often side effect-laden. It is our position that the onus is on proponents of LIMA-type philosophies to account for the many thousands of practitioners who achieve good outcomes on the full variety of case types over many decades without any use of aversive stimuli. Research into training methods consistently finds reward-based training to be not only less stressful for dogs, but equally or more effective than negative reinforcement- and positive punishment-based methods, including in contexts traditionally believed to require the use of aversive techniques (e.g. [recall around livestock](#)).

## Reward Removal

In contrast to aversive stimuli, there is no research suggesting that reward removal (negative punishment, e.g. closing hand in a "leave-it" exercise, turning one's back or briefly exiting when a dog jumps up to greet, leaving the room when a puppy

bites too hard) is detrimental, ineffective or carries negative side effects. Furthermore, researchers consistently refer to the use of reward removal (negative punishment/P-) as subsumed under "reward-based training," as it is inevitable insofar as that, from the perspective of the learner, responses that do not make criteria and go unrewarded will decrease in frequency. The American College of Veterinary Behavior explicitly [supports the use of reward removal](#). On the human side, the American College of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, American College of Pediatrics and American Psychological Association all support the use of time out from positive reinforcement. Furthermore, in dogs, in contrast to differential reinforcement, reward removal has a narrower target, i.e. by reducing or eliminating one undesired behavior, the dog may continue to behave at liberty rather than being taught a particular behavior, which must then be reinforced by the owner in order prevent the problem. It is therefore the position of The Academy that reward-removal (negative punishment/P-) is a safe, humane and effective technique.



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