

## Be Right Back! Podcast with Julie Naismith

### Episode 094 Transcript – Understanding the Problems with Punishment\_ An Interview with Dr. Karolina Westlund.

<https://julienaismith.com/episode-094/>

If you follow me at all for any length of time, you'll know that I am fervently in favor of training that treats a dog with kindness, and that means training a dog without resorting to punishment or aversives. And I'm totally committed to ethical, force-free, kind training, not just because I think it's the right thing to do. It is the right thing to do, but also because any other form of training, training that is punitive, is risky and it's damaging and it's just not the right approach. And the evidence shows us that.

And that's why in today's episode, I am so excited to share with you a conversation that I had with the fabulous Dr. Carolina Westland. Now, about five years ago, maybe longer, 2016, I think, she wrote this article, this fantastic article about the effects of punishment. So what happens when we use punishment to train dogs? And recently, earlier in 2023, Carolina updated that blog because in case you missed it, and I kind of hope you did miss it, there was a huge storm in the dog training world early in 2023 about the use of aversives.

Now, aversives are a controversial topic at the best of times, but for whatever reason, and I won't go into it here, but there was an extra controversy about the use of aversives. And so Carolina dug out this amazing blog. And you can find a link to the blog in the show notes because I highly recommend that you go and read it in full. But she went back to that blog and she updated it. And today I'm diving into a discussion with her about the blog. I'm asking her lots of questions that really piqued my interest based on my interest being piqued when I read the blog. And I think you'll find what she has to say just fascinating.

Hello, and welcome to the Be Right Back separation Anxiety Podcast. Hi, I'm Julie Naismith, dog trainer, author, and full on separation anxiety geek. I've helped thousands of dogs overcome separation anxiety with my books, my online programs, my trainer certification, and my separation anxiety training app. And this podcast, it's all about sharing my tips and tricks to help you teach your dog how to be happy at home alone, too.

Speaker A

Hey, Carolina, it's so good to have you here today. And we're talking about this amazing blog that you wrote on punishment back in.

Speaker B

2016, but that you refreshed recently. Tell me about that. Why did you go back and decide to revisit it?

Speaker C

Since my own learning is constantly evolving and changing, after a while, after a year or two, I often change my thinking on a topic. So I wrote that one back in 2016 and it was updated in 2019, I think. So it was high time to revisit it again. And also, the second reason was actually because given the latest upheaval in the dog training community, there's been a lot of discussion on the use of aversives. I felt that we needed an updated resource on the potential fallouts of punishment.

Speaker A

Yeah, and it's interesting as well, because when did you update the blog? Is it about February this year, 2020?

Speaker B

Yeah, I think so.

Speaker A [00:03:33]:

And then just ten days, maybe two weeks ago, we got the announcement from England that they were following the rest of the UK and lots of countries in Europe and banning shock collar. So I thought, wow, so timely that you revisited that in February and it all resurfaced again about ten days ago. So I keep telling people, go and read Carolina's blog. So, yeah, your timing has been immaculate. It's a very detailed blog, so I recommend people grab a cuppa, find a few minutes, and sit down and really focus on it. Because if you are at all interested in the way we work to change animal behavior and punishment particularly, you'll love it. But Karen, for today's podcast, you talk about 20 problems in this blog and then you divide them into almost three main groups. Can you just talk to me about those three main groups and broadly explain what you mean by them?

Speaker D [00:04:27]:

Yeah, absolutely.

Speaker C [00:04:28]:

So over the years, I've read articles and I've been part of discussions about the downsides of punishment, and it struck me that there are so many of them. There's not just one potential

adverse effect. There's at least 20. I've written about the 20 that I could come up with, but I'm sure there's more.

Speaker A [00:04:51]:

Wow, okay.

Speaker C [00:04:51]:

And I realized that these could be sorted into these three buckets, if you will. So one of the buckets is so the reason why people punish is because they want to get rid of an unwanted behavior.

Speaker D [00:05:03]:

Yeah.

Speaker C [00:05:04]:

So one of the bucket is then is what actually happens to the unwanted behavior. And we could have three outcomes. It could be that it diminishes, so the punishment may be effective. And now while that does happen, it's very inconsistent in that that does happen. It could have no effect that you punish the behavior and nothing happens. And we know that one of the situations where this occurs is when the unwanted behavior has become really habitual, because habits tend to become a bit disengaged from the consequence that maintain the habit. They're released by a stimulus. A stimulus is there that tells the animal to do a specific behavior. And originally that behavior led to an outcome that the animal wanted, but over time, the connection to that outcome is reduced.

Speaker D [00:05:57]:

So punishment tends to not work on behaviors that have been very well established and habitual interesting.

Speaker A [00:06:05]:

And habits can be so powerful for good as well.

Speaker C [00:06:09]:

We can turn that on its head and saying we can also choose to form habits that are good. Yeah, but for the unwanted habits, punishment is just not a good idea at all. It will have very little effect, typically.

Speaker A [00:06:23]:

Is that why when people for example, who continue to smoke and know that one of the consequences might be all these diseases that they develop. They don't stop smoking, not knowing that stuff could happen. They do it despite knowing that stuff could happen.

Speaker C [00:06:38]:

Yeah, absolutely. But it's also that it's an addiction.

Speaker D [00:06:42]:

True.

Speaker C [00:06:42]:

Yeah. So you've got this little monster in your brain saying smoke it, smoke it. That's really hard to turn down, I think. And the third thing that can happen.

Speaker D [00:06:54]:

Is that it can actually increase the.

Speaker C [00:06:57]:

Unwanted behavior, which is really weird. And I think that people don't realize this, but there are at least a couple of situations. One of them is when the animal is showing fearful behavior because punishment, at least when if we're talking things that cause pain or discomfort to the animal and these things tend to cause a fear reaction in the animal. And when the animal gets fearful, he'll show his fear repertoire of behavior.

Speaker D [00:07:24]:

And if that repertoire of behavior is.

Speaker C [00:07:27]:

Among the unwanted behavior, you punish the animal and you're actually increasing or you intend to punish the animal, I should say, or the behavior and you're actually reinforcing it because it's shown more often and it's often unnecessary. Also, it's not like we have to use it to change behavior. No, there's often many other solutions.

Speaker A [00:07:50]:

Yeah. So we've got at least 20 problems.

Speaker D [00:07:53]:

Yeah.

Speaker C [00:07:54]:

This is one of the buckets. This is the behavior bucket.

Speaker A [00:07:57]:

Yeah. Okay.

Speaker D [00:07:58]:

Yeah.

Speaker A [00:07:58]:

The next one sorry, the next one.

Speaker C [00:08:00]:

Would be the animal bucket is looking at what else happens to the animal. Okay, so we're doing something that's uncomfortable and it might change behavior, might not. But what else is going on? What are the side effects? Essentially? So effects on the animal are also unpredictable and it depends on a number of different factors. But some documented effects that people have seen sometimes are that they start showing superstitious behavior, or apathy, or fear, or aggression, or avoidance behavior, or reduced learning to mention. So to me, the problem is the unpredictability of punishment techniques used by ordinary people who buy these gadgets. Because this blog post was really about shock collars. You buy these gadgets and you just strap them onto the animal and not knowing the first thing about behavior can really blow up in your face. So not only could the unwanted behavior actually get worse by the use of corrections, but we could potentially see these humongous side effects and a number of other unwanted behaviors could pop up. So that would be the second bucket.

Speaker A [00:09:09]:

And you talk about ordinary people buying these gadgets, buying these devices and these potential problems arising. But to be clear, these 20 plus problems, they can also happen whether somebody is supposedly highly skilled in using one of these tools or not. So it's not, oh, it's because people don't know how to do this. Many of these problems relate to just the process itself, not who's doing it.

Speaker C [00:09:35]:

Absolutely. It's not who's doing it, but I'm thinking that hopefully the pros would understand the risks a little bit.

Speaker D [00:09:45]:

And just by the way that these.

Speaker C [00:09:48]:

Things are marketed, it seems that the random people on the street don't realize that.

Speaker A [00:09:54]:

Yeah, well, I think unfortunately in most countries in the world, dog training is an unregulated profession. So it's really hard to say that everybody who sticks a sign up and says we're a dog trainer would understand this.

Speaker D [00:10:07]:

You are right.

Speaker C [00:10:08]:

Yes, that is a good point.

Speaker A [00:10:10]:

Very variable.

Speaker C [00:10:12]:

Very variable. Anyway, so the third bucket then would be the effect on the punisher, on.

Speaker D [00:10:17]:

The person doing the punishment.

Speaker C [00:10:20]:

Yeah, and it's interesting because imagine then that your dog is doing something that you're annoyed by. Let's say he's barking, for instance. So bark, bark, bark, bark, bark, bark. And then you administer a punisher. So you do something, you zap him with this electric collar, for instance, and he turns quiet. So essentially you have just been negatively reinforced because you were exposed to an aversive stimulus, the barking, the barking and then you did a behavior, the zapping and then the barking stopped.

Speaker D [00:10:56]:

And so this, I think is what.

Speaker C [00:10:59]:

Maintains the behavior in the person is that we think it works because we often see this very, at least very, what do you call it, momentary stop in the problem behavior. And we think, oh, it works.

Speaker D [00:11:14]:

And then it might, you know, it.

Speaker C [00:11:16]:

Might be that the animal starts barking again 5 seconds later, but that doesn't to our brain, yeah, it doesn't matter because our brain is already infused with all those neurotransmitters signaling. Woohoo, it worked, it worked, it worked. And it could also be positively reinforcing because we feel like we've got power over another living being and so it's reinforcing and therefore we do more of it.

Speaker A [00:11:42]:

Oh, that's so interesting because I've often wondered when I'm thinking about the dog training community, the dog training professionals, let's call them professionals, people who take money for dog training. I often think that using these sorts of tools can be reinforcing, positively reinforcing. Because if they get those seemingly quick results, clients love them. If they're posting a video on TikTok, it gets tons of views because in 1 minute the dog has got the problem behavior.

Speaker C [00:12:11]:

Yeah, so it's positively reinforcing and it's negatively reinforcing.

Speaker A [00:12:15]:

Interesting.

Speaker C [00:12:15]:

And we also think it's working when it's not. So we think that this short because very often you will see a short break in the unwanted behavior. Yeah, and then very often it will come straight back again and we see that break and we think it's working. And then we don't realize that actually, since it's returning, the modern definition of punishment is really that it should diminish behavior. Yeah, but very often that's not what happens. We don't see that diminishment of behavior because it comes right back again. And I think that's problematic because then it's not punishment. By definition. We might call it abuse, perhaps even.

Speaker A [00:12:52]:

Yeah. The fascinating thing. There's so many fascinating things in this conversation. But when I think about the trainers that I work with, who work primarily with separation anxiety, I say often the training sessions that you have or the way clients can often feel like this, they can feel wholly unrewarded because often you're not seeing a change in the dog. Session to session. It's not dramatic. It can be very variable, even though that variability might not mean that the learning isn't going on in the dog's brain. We're just not seeing that change in behavior. And it can be tough because you are not getting instant hits.

Speaker D [00:13:28]:

Whoa.

Speaker A [00:13:28]:

This dog has now stopped barking. This dog is now because it's a very slow, steady change. It's not that kind of big hit reinforcement. Interesting stuff. So those are the three then, effects on one for behavior, on the animal, and on the punisher.

Speaker C [00:13:43]:

Yeah, and also, I might add to that last one is also that it could sabotage the relationship we have with the animals. And also that I'm not saying that all these 20 things happen every single time we punish an animal, but the potential is there. Just like when you take a drug and you open up that

sheet of horrific side effects, you read through them and you just go, oh my God, I hope that doesn't happen, that some of those things are going to be common side effects and some are going to be more unusual. And I think it's highly context dependent also.

Speaker A [00:14:20]:

Yes, that's fair enough. So let's talk a bit more about those 20 problems then. As I say, go and read the blog. If you haven't read Carolyn's blog, go and read it. I highly recommend it. But we'll talk about some of the more salient or important of the 20 problems. So what do you think those are, if we were to dive into those?

Speaker D [00:14:41]:

Well, I guess one thing to say.

Speaker C [00:14:43]:

Is that we often punish again because we want to get rid of a specific behavior and we might think that that is all that we're doing. But there are so many different side effects of using punishment and some of them might be much worse than the original problem. And I think that my top three of the really nasty side effects would be fear, which is a very common side effect to being exposed to a painful or scary or uncomfortable stimulus or aggression, that they start showing aggressive behavior. And then the third thing would be that the quality of the relationship might be compromised, affected. If the animal starts associating you with unpleasant things, he might start avoiding you.

Speaker A [00:15:34]:

Yes, absolutely. Let's just dig into those a little bit. So how does using a punishment, how does that relate to a dog developing fear then?

Speaker C [00:15:47]:

Well, the moment the animal perceives the aversive stimulus, it's aversive because the animal doesn't like it. So it will trigger some sort of negative emotional state in the animal.

Speaker D [00:15:58]:

And if it's painful, fear will very.

Speaker C [00:16:02]:

Often be involved because fear is triggered by pain. Pain is one of the fear triggers that causes a fearful reaction. And fear involves freezing, running, hiding, and all kinds of body language signals indicating that the animal is in a fearful state. We'll get this physiological and behavioral reaction to the punisher and then we also get this learning component that the animal then starts, okay, so this was dangerous. Something bad happened here. I need to learn about the situation so that I can avoid it in the future.

Speaker A [00:16:40]:

Right?

Speaker C [00:16:40]:

And so they'll look around and they'll see, okay, I'm in the kitchen, mom is here. I'm standing with my front 2ft on the rug. And that's when bad things happen. So that emotion of fear might get triggered by stimuli associated with the zapping or the punishing situation. So they might become fearful of mom if she was there. They might become fearful, avoid the rug, they might be in the kitchen, but just not walk on the rug because the feeling of the rug underneath the feet was associated with the unpleasant experience. Or they might avoid the kitchen.

Speaker D [00:17:20]:

Yeah.

Speaker C [00:17:20]:

So we see these ripples spreading and it's highly unpredictable what stimuli or what events in the environment will get, quote unquote, infected, what the animal will come to associate with the scary thing.

Speaker A [00:17:36]:

And that's the thing isn't that association, it's the association of the dog trying to piece together this well, what was it? What was it about what happened in my environment and the context that made that bad thing happen? And it's trying to gather all these associations. Right? Yeah.

Speaker C [00:17:52]:

So he's trying to learn it's completely natural and adaptive, to use an ethological term, the behaviors that increase survival and reproduction, if you will, that learning about where, when and how and in the presence of whom scary things happen.

Speaker D [00:18:14]:

Yeah.

Speaker A [00:18:15]:

And if people aren't clear on this, because I'm sure most people listen to this podcast, haven't used these tools, but you can think about vets are a really good example, aren't they? Because most dogs don't love having stuff done to their bodies. And we can do a lot of things to help dogs have more pleasurable and easier times at the vets. But over time, lots of dogs just develop a fear of the vets. And you can see often that spreads as you described it. The dog will start getting nervous in the reception and then it might be the car park and then it might be the journey to the vet and so on.

Speaker C [00:18:50]:

That's a very good example. Yes, absolutely. The restraint and the handling that occurs at the vet is an unpleasant stimulus. And we get this fear learning that can infect anything that is a reasonably reliable predictor of going to the vets.

Speaker D [00:19:09]:

Yeah, yeah.

Speaker A [00:19:10]:

And that's you mentioned this when we've chatted previously. Just an aside, body handling is a really big deal for an animal, isn't it?

Speaker C [00:19:18]:

Yeah. It's interesting that restraint is typically a much bigger deal than pain right, for many animals. Yeah.

Speaker A [00:19:26]:

Because they can't escape pain.

Speaker D [00:19:27]:

Yeah.

Speaker C [00:19:28]:

Pain is a fear trigger in and of itself. But so is restraint. Yeah, absolutely. If you think of it, that's what typically happens when you're caught by a predator, is that the predator has you in their clutches and they're holding on to you. And so that's also one of the reasons why aggression is often triggered, is because animals then use aggression to get out of that situation.

Speaker D [00:19:51]:

Yeah.

Speaker C [00:19:52]:

So I mentioned aggression being one of the potential side effects. So that's two roads that the animal can go down, he can go down the fear road and you might see a freezing fleeing or even becoming shut down, or he might go down the aggression road and start retaliating instead to get out of the situation. So this fight and flight is really a very common side effect of punishers involving pain, I think.

Speaker A [00:20:21]:

And both of those are about trying to stop that or trying to get away from it, trying to avoid it, trying to escape it. So both of those I need something not to happen to me.

Speaker D [00:20:29]:

Yes.

Speaker A [00:20:30]:

Interesting. So we've got the problem with fear, we've got the problem with essential aggression. And then the other big salient problem that you wanted to raise was about the relationship.

Speaker C [00:20:42]:

Yeah.

Speaker D [00:20:43]:

Yes, absolutely.

Speaker C [00:20:45]:

And again, it's the same thing there. It's the classical conditioning that the animal comes to associate you with bad things happening. Not just you, any person or any living being. It could be other dogs, other if a cat is in the room when the animal is getting zapped, he might associate the cat with that unpleasant experience and he might associate your two year old with that unpleasant experience. So it's highly unpredictable. But anyone who happens to be in the neighborhood or in the environment when the zapping happens could potentially become associated with it.

Speaker D [00:21:29]:

Right.

Speaker C [00:21:29]:

So the animal will start fearing that person.

Speaker A [00:21:31]:

And how do you control that? How do you possibly.

Speaker D [00:21:36]:

Because a lot.

Speaker A [00:21:37]:

Of times this punishment is used in quotes, real life situations. So you can't put the dog in a box and administer this punishment because the punishment is often related to something that the dog's doing in the home or on the walk or whatever. So it's not like you can say, everybody get out of the way while I shot the dog, or completely neutralize the environment while I shot the dog.

Speaker C [00:21:58]:

No.

Speaker D [00:22:03]:

I don't know if we should.

Speaker C [00:22:04]:

Go into how to best administer punishment so that it works, but that sounds like a recipe for complete disaster you just mentioned, because the idea is that the unwanted behavior should be going on when the shock is administered. No, there are so many ways to get rid of unwanted behavior. I've even asked around because I was interested in this, because some behavior consultants use this hierarchical ethical thinking called the humane hierarchy, whereby you start the intervention with making changes to the environment and then you do positive reinforcement and then you do all these other things before you, as a final thing, resort to punishment. Perhaps. I was interesting, how often do people actually get to that last step? And I've been asking around, and it's like the really good behavioral consultants, they never get there because they can solve those situations without them. Even though we might have the tool of using punishment, it's on a shelf somewhere collecting dust because we're not using it. We're using these other techniques that do work and that do not cause fear or aggression or compromise the relationship and that are, in fact, even fun and interesting for the animal.

Speaker A [00:23:31]:

Yeah. And you mentioned the word aversive. I've got a question about that. Could you just expand on what you mean by something the dog finds aversive?

Speaker C [00:23:42]:

If we were to define it, I would say that something aversive is something that the animal is willing to work.

Speaker D [00:23:49]:

To get rid of.

Speaker C [00:23:51]:

Just like something that's competitive is something that the animal is willing to work.

Speaker D [00:23:55]:

To get access to.

Speaker C [00:23:57]:

So positive reinforcers. The animal is willing to work to do behaviors, to get access to them. And aversives unpleasant stimuli is something that the animal will do behaviors to get rid of, to escape or avoid.

Speaker D [00:24:10]:

Yeah.

Speaker A [00:24:11]:

So going back to the humane hierarchy, I think there are many of us who don't like that as a model, just don't think that that's an appropriate model to use for a number of reasons. One big reason is that everybody has a different tolerance of how far to go along that scale and how quickly to move on that scale. That's quite important to me. So there's the whole I only use it as a last resort. But last resort happens to be every training session that I do with every dog.

Speaker C [00:24:42]:

Right, okay.

Speaker A [00:24:43]:

So that's your last resort. And to me, there's the kind of the slippery slope thing of all right, if we say that all these could potentially be used and they can, I get it. I get how we had a chat beforehand, didn't we, about how this stuff works. But take separation anxiety, for example. I'm certain that some dogs who, if they are created and confined for long enough, will eventually give up on their behavior, the problem behavior which is driven by their fear of being alone. To some dogs, I am sure eventually I've seen it. I've seen some dogs eventually just give up because the process of being crated is so horrific that if getting out of the crate means stopping the crying because they're petrified, they may well do that. But for me, the process to get them there is just not humane. That's just not an acceptable way of getting to that change in behavior.

Speaker C [00:25:35]:

I have another concern with that humane hierarchy, and it's that we were assuming that we're having increased intrusiveness on every step of the way. And I'm not sure that's the case even.

Speaker D [00:25:47]:

Right.

Speaker C [00:25:48]:

I can think of situations where positive reinforcement we're looking at the situation formally, it's positive reinforcement, but it's actually unpleasant to the animal. And I can think of situations where we're using formally negative reinforcement. And if we're looking at the animal's emotional

reaction to it, it's quite fun. So I would rather we look at the animal's emotional reaction to the approach that we're taking rather than this highly structured and formalized way. And it's going to be so incredibly context dependent depending on the animal and your skill as a trainer and your reinforcement history and the relationship you have with that animal and so on and so forth. So there are many things to do and there are many things to try that are not unpleasant to the animal.

Speaker D [00:26:46]:

Yeah.

Speaker A [00:26:47]:

I think it's so critical that if we're talking purely from a training perspective, not living with a dog, but training dogs, if as dog professionals, we cannot tell that that dog is finding a process unpleasant, if that is positive reinforcement, yes. If we cannot tell that that dog is finding sorry. We intended it to be positive reinforcement. But if we cannot tell in that session that dog is finding whatever we're doing scary, intimidating, unpleasant, uncomfortable, then we should not be taking money from people for being dog trainers, because we should be fully aware of the dog's response to that process, not just blithely going ahead because we think it will work.

Speaker C [00:27:33]:

It sounds like we're in full agreement.

Speaker A [00:27:41]:

We should be so aware of their state, and we're not. We're just blindly continuing with our processes because we have this belief that our process is best and it will work. I want to ask you another question about that also. That whole thing about sometimes dogs respond in a way that we didn't expect based on the process that we're using. And the classic one that comes up over and over is when I put a shock collar on my dog, as we're about to go out of the house for a walk, he gets really excited. So how can you say he doesn't like being shocked?

Speaker C [00:28:12]:

Yeah, so I'm supposing that when you're putting that collar out to go for a walk, you're also going for a walk.

Speaker A [00:28:21]:

Yes.

Speaker D [00:28:21]:

Right.

Speaker C [00:28:22]:

So he's expecting the walk. And in that context, if you weigh these two experiences, the positive experience of the walk and the aversive experience of being shocked, the positive experience might weigh higher.

Speaker D [00:28:42]:

Now, I would also say that it.

Speaker C [00:28:45]:

Depends, because I can. Just for full disclosure, I don't work hands on with dogs myself, so I don't know this to be true. But I could expect that for some animals, putting the collar on could lead to just an increase in arousal, because they then know that something aversive might happen. And so we see this increase in arousal. That doesn't necessarily have to mean that it's positive emotional excitement. It could also be negative. I don't know your take on that. Yes, all of the it could go both of those. It could be that the animal is excited and the shocking is such a small piece of the experience that it doesn't really matter, or it could be a huge piece of it and we can have a strong negative emotional reaction with a lot of arousal.

Speaker D [00:29:36]:

Yeah.

Speaker A [00:29:36]:

And also it's a collar that's not doing anything at that moment. So it could also, going back to what you talked about, about association previously, it could also be that that collar only becomes intimidating when the dog is at the dog park or when the dog is walking past livestock, because that's where the collar gets used.

Speaker C [00:29:56]:

Oh, yes, of course. That's a very good point, that the collar per se is not a good predictor for the animal, that something unpleasant.

Speaker A [00:30:04]:

Is going to happen because it doesn't get shocked in the hallway as it's going out. For the most part. Yeah. I mean, lots of dogs love going for walks but don't like harnesses, on the other hand. So that's an interesting one, but once the harness is on, the dog forgets. But also, to me, this is a bit like the dog at the vets. How many times do you see dogs at the vets? Who is this the right word? They look a bit conflicted because they know that bad things happen to them in the exam room, but they also know that there's a shower of treats that happens in reception. So they kind of go, oh, this is a place I get treats. But wait a minute, it's also the place where oh, so that whole thing, what did you describe, it just arousal. They're just like what's happening?

Speaker C [00:30:44]:

And I think they're also in conflict. Yes. This ambivalence and this not knowing what's about to happen is typically that the ambivalence causes arousal. Also, if they know that good things are going to happen, they might not get as aroused or if they know that bad things aren't going to happen. But this not knowing can really spike the arousal, I think.

Speaker D [00:31:08]:

Yeah.

Speaker A [00:31:09]:

And I think an overall point as well is that you sort of mentioned when you're talking about aversives, is that it's not for us to decide whether the dog finds something pleasant or unpleasant. That's the dog's decision, and we need to observe and work that out. So I want to come on to something that you write in the blog, which I absolutely loved. And since rereading the blog back in February, I don't know how many times I've used this similar kind of rubric to help people through help my trainers through problems they've been having.

Speaker C [00:31:39]:

I loved it all. Right?

Speaker A [00:31:40]:

And it was about when you talk about, okay, so if you are a trainer who uses punishment and you're thinking about, should I make this decision about punishment, you talk about two things. You say, well, hang on. Ask yourself, would you rather assume that punishment is problematic? And I'm quoting here, I think, from your blog, when in fact it isn't. So would you rather assume that punishment is problematic when in fact it isn't? Or would you rather assume that punishment is

not problematic, when in fact it is? I love this whole section. Tell me a bit more about that experiment. You call it an experiment in the blog. Tell me a bit more about that.

Speaker C [00:32:19]:

So it was actually triggered by an email I got after so I published the revision of the blog post, and then just the next day, I got an email from someone who said that you're wrong, that punishment isn't problematic, and you should learn from some balanced trainer how to use it properly. And so then I went back and I did another little small edit just the day after. So lucky that you saw it after that second edit then. Well, anyway, because essentially, she could be right. I mean, I could be wrong. Let's say I made that mistake, that I'm publishing this blog post, and I'm vastly inflating an issue that is really negligible. Let's say that punishment isn't a big deal and in fact, it's useful, and those 20 problems don't exist. So what's the worst that could happen then, if we don't use punishment?

Speaker A [00:33:12]:

Dogs will get trained with cookies.

Speaker C [00:33:15]:

Yeah, dogs will get trained with cookies. Isn't that too bad? And in the case I was discussing in this blog post, it's also because, again, this blog post was triggered by an ad that I saw where people using a shock collar, a remotely controlled shock collar to get a dog to stop countersurfing in the kitchen. So the worst that could happen there would also be that if I'm wrong, but we're still saying that don't use punishment and the reader doesn't use punishment. And also, again, if this is the worst case scenario, let's say that we're using the cookies, but it's not working.

Speaker D [00:33:51]:

Yeah.

Speaker C [00:33:52]:

So then he'll keep stealing from the counter.

Speaker D [00:33:56]:

Yes.

Speaker C [00:33:57]:

So that's the sort of the worst thing that can happen if I'm wrong is that the cookies are not working and the dog is stealing from the cupboard.

Speaker D [00:34:05]:

Yeah.

Speaker A [00:34:05]:

And we might have to keep putting the cookies away in the cupboard to stop the dog stealing.

Speaker C [00:34:11]:

And then in the scenario, too, is that the people using punishment are wrong, that punishment is problematic, that these 20 problems do sometimes happen. Not all of them, but it's like Russian roulette. Sometimes things just blow up literally in your face.

Speaker A [00:34:32]:

But that's so important. Sorry, she say so many important things. I keep interrupting you just because you say so many brilliant things. But that's hugely important. That Russian roulette point, because you don't know I think you said this earlier, but I just want to state this again. You don't know which of these 20 plus problems you might encounter.

Speaker C [00:34:51]:

Yeah. It's like sitting down at a card table and getting a really shitty hand or getting a good hand. You don't know which hand you're going to get. You don't know. So, to continue this thought experiment, let's say it's the person using punishment who is wrong. They're neglecting the real problems with punishment. And the critical question then is, what is the worst that could happen if you use punishment on the dog who is countersurfing? So the worst that could happen would be perhaps that your two year old is in the room while punishment is being administered. The animal goes into aggressive attack, attacks the two year old, mauls him, and we can stretch this as far as we want. Maybe the child is just a few stitches and he'll be all right, but probably we'll have to euthanize the dog, or perhaps the child dies, kids gets killed by dogs. That happens.

Speaker A [00:35:51]:

Yeah.

Speaker C [00:35:52]:

Just comparing these two, what's the worst outcome that could happen? And the second bit of that would then how would you rather be wrong?

Speaker A [00:36:01]:

Yes.

Speaker C [00:36:03]:

So which mistake would you rather make out of these two? If you're wrong and the worst thing possible happens, would you have the animal countersurfing or would you have your child dead and the dog euthanized?

Speaker D [00:36:16]:

Yeah.

Speaker A [00:36:18]:

And it's so important, I think, to think of it in that way. And just as an aside for those listening who work with separation anxiety, whether you've got a dog with separation anxiety or whether you're a trainer, how I've been using it with my community is to say one of the big problems, big challenges we face often when we're doing desensitization is when we're watching a dog. We can have doubts, we can think, I think this dog actually isn't scared. So I think this dog is maybe frustrated, but not full on blown panic. There is vocalization, so I think there's often people want to let the session run on. They want to just keep going until the dog stops the behavior naturally without us ending the session early. My take on that is, okay, the problem we have is we could let the dog just keep barking and barking and it could just be the dog is a bit frustrated and ten minutes later it goes quiet and never does it again. But we don't know that. And the dog might actually just escalate into a bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger panic. And now we've got a situation where a dog has just had an hour in a panic on its own. We know the impact that big, fearful, safe situation have on a dog. So what's the worst thing that could happen if we come back and end a session? We've just come back and ended a training session, what's the worst thing that could happen? If we let a dog who's in a panic continue to panic for an hour, 2 hours, 3 hours, we could potentially have just gone right back to square one with that dog's, learning that being home then is fine.

Speaker C [00:37:44]:

How would you rather be wrong?

Speaker A [00:37:46]:

How would you rather be wrong? Yes. Thank you. And there's a but. So coming back to not separation anxiety, but there's a big but. And I don't know if the person who contacted you said this the butt was wait a minute, because actually the only way to stop this dog from being euthanized is to use a shot collar. So no, I disagree with you. If I do what you say and don't use a shot collar, this dog will die. So how often do we hear that? Tell me what you think about that as an argument.

Speaker C [00:38:17]:

Yeah, I have heard that argument as well. Yes, and it's often phrased as if those two options are the only ones. It's a classical ethical dilemma that you either have to punish the animal to resolve the situation or you have to euthanize the animal. And in such cases, we would have to choose the most humane option, choosing the option that best eliminates suffering and improves the animal's quality of life. And I think I can think of scenarios where euthanasia would be the most humane options. And if we are using that humane hierarchy thing, I can think of scenarios where well executed punishment would perhaps be the most humane option out of those two options. But the thing is that I don't think that those are the only two options out there. I really don't think so. I think that in 99.99% of cases, that assumption that punishment is the only thing that's going to work, I think that assumption is faulty. And I think that very often the solution is still out there. We just have to find it.

Speaker A [00:39:22]:

Yeah. And there's people, as my mentor, Gene Donaldson will say, in the trenches, day after day after day after day, working with these difficult cases, that people say, you can only resolve this with these verses and they are doing it every day without using aversive. So, yeah, it definitely can be done. I think the important point there is you made it's that ethical dilemma, these aren't the only two choices. So we shouldn't be presenting it as that.

Speaker D [00:39:50]:

It's tricky.

Speaker A [00:39:51]:

It's kind of being slippery about things as far as I'm concerned.

Speaker C [00:39:55]:

And also in today's day and age, we don't have to invent the wheel and find that solution on our own. There's so many examples of people solving really difficult behavioral problems without resorting to punishment and they're sharing their techniques and expertise.

Speaker D [00:40:08]:

You are.

Speaker C [00:40:09]:

And so many other people are doing that. There's courses and blogs and discussion groups.

Speaker D [00:40:14]:

Yeah. Dogs that chase dogs that are on.

Speaker A [00:40:16]:

The same trail as snakes. Dogs that chase yes, so on and so on.

Speaker C [00:40:20]:

But there's also no doubt in my mind that the most difficult behavioral problems will need several people's input.

Speaker D [00:40:27]:

Yeah.

Speaker C [00:40:29]:

And also, we must also acknowledge that it is difficult finding the good advice because there's so many people that want to help, and so there's so much information out there on the Internet, but some of it is quite bad. So it's a good finding the good information out of that minefield of alternatives. That can be difficult.

Speaker A [00:40:53]:

It's so tricky. I tell you what, it's changed ever since being in this world and getting a better understanding of where to find good information, you being one of them. It's changed my view on articles I might read on health or science, because I've read articles in publications that I really

trust and really value, and they've talked about separation anxiety and it's just made me want to scream. So then I think, oh, so that article they had about gut microbiome, maybe?

Speaker C [00:41:26]:

No.

Speaker D [00:41:26]:

Yeah.

Speaker C [00:41:27]:

It kind of makes you question everything, doesn't it?

Speaker D [00:41:31]:

Yeah.

Speaker C [00:41:32]:

And also, I should say that one of my main problems with the use of punishment isn't this hypothetical scenario that, oh, let's say if you can solve 99.99% of all cases, should you then not be allowed to use punishment in the last fraction of a milli per mill? That discussion isn't so interesting for me. If people use those types of intrusive techniques after everything else has failed and they have consulted with others and they come up short, that's not where we should put our efforts. I think it's that these devices are still sold over the counter to the unsuspecting dog owner who doesn't know anything about learning and behavior, and they just go home and strap them on their dog and start zapping away. That is where we should focus our efforts or teaching them alternatives, I think.

Speaker D [00:42:21]:

Yeah.

Speaker A [00:42:21]:

And that's why I love some of the initiatives from people like the Pet Professional Guild about there needs to be more transparency about these devices because the number of times you'll ask people, well, how does this work on your dog? Oh, it just sends a message. Oh, it's just a communication. How does it communicate? Well, it's just so they're not being told. And I think so many people, when they find out, really how these things work, and they only work when they hurt

and they only work when they scare the dog, they're like, Well, I didn't know that. And if you read the packaging, no wonder. No wonder they didn't know it.

Speaker D [00:42:58]:

Yeah.

Speaker C [00:42:59]:

I think that's where we should focus our effort.

Speaker A [00:43:02]:

It's a really good point. It is a really good point on.

Speaker C [00:43:04]:

The people that don't know and the.

Speaker D [00:43:06]:

Packaging being, as you say, very misleading.

Speaker A [00:43:10]:

Very misleading. And it's okay to do that. So we were just talking about problems and solutions. There's something else. I've heard you say that again. I use all the time now. And you talk about when you look at a behavior, an animal's behavior, let's talk about dog's behavior because that's what dog podcasts often what we're talking about as problem behavior to us is a solution for the dog. The dog is doing that because it solves a problem. Our problem, their solution. Tell me a bit more.

Speaker C [00:43:39]:

Yeah. Mind flip, isn't it? No, it's just if you're looking at what the animal is doing, they are doing a behavior that solves the problem. For them that behavior is somehow reinforced typically that they get something that they want or that they get away from something that they don't want. So to them that behavior is like, yay, I found a solution to my problem. Hooray. And they don't realize that what they are doing. The choice of behavior is actually annoying to us. So to us that is the problem. And I think that very often the solution to our problem is by finding some other solution for the animal to their problem.

Speaker A [00:44:23]:

Yes.

Speaker C [00:44:24]:

So asking them to please show some other type of behavior to resolve their issue or if it's a fear related issue or separation anxiety, that we change their emotional state in relation to that context so that they don't feel the need to do those behaviors anymore.

Speaker D [00:44:45]:

Yes, exactly.

Speaker A [00:44:47]:

And that you can keep trying to put a lid on their behavior, but until the dog feels differently, there's a really good chance it just keeps that.

Speaker D [00:44:55]:

It just keeps popping up again.

Speaker C [00:44:57]:

And that's also one of the things of course, that can happen with punishment is that if you punish one unwanted behavior, the animal might then find another solution that's even more annoying to us.

Speaker A [00:45:11]:

Yeah, I just love that concept. It is so true. I mean, it all makes sense to them. It's just hang on a minute, I'm doing this because I'm scared or I'm doing this because I'm hungry or I'm doing this because I like people. What about it don't you like?

Speaker C [00:45:24]:

I'm showing normal doggy behavior, I'm barking, I'm scratching, I'm getting into things and.

Speaker D [00:45:30]:

Eating and yeah, what's the problem?

Speaker A [00:45:35]:

And actually that is one of the problems with punishment as well, isn't it? Confusing. Hang on a minute, this doesn't make sense to me, but when I do this thing that I think is good, something bad happens. What?

Speaker D [00:45:47]:

Oh goodness.

Speaker A [00:45:48]:

I just love the conversation so much and I could go on forever, but I know that people have. I don't want to do a three hour podcast as much as I could with you, though, currently, I really could. But let's just finish on a well, I think this has been a really positive conversation, so I'm not going to say finish on a positive note because it's been positive throughout. Let's talk about anybody who's listening to this podcast saying yeah, but yeah, but I've got a dog who's doing this and it's really challenging. What advice do you give to them about where to seek help or what approach to training they should use?

Speaker C [00:46:19]:

Well, I think that finding a trainer who is part of a larger team of people so that this person is willing to seek help if they can't resolve the problem. I think that not being too proud to ask around to have a veterinarian on board because very often unwanted behavior in the animals in our care can be understood in terms of a medical condition of some kind. So that would be a first thing. I think that this person is part of a team or has sort of not too much pride in discussing with others. And then I would seek somebody either with a lima or a force free approach or a least intrusive, minimally aversive approach. And I think the really good ones, they don't get to the point where they use punishment. Yeah, absolutely don't. So that's not a concern for me. Yeah, but again, just back to that, this expression just it takes a village to raise a child, but sometimes it takes a group of behavioral experts. If your problem is really difficult to resolve, it will take behaviorists and ethologists and veterinarians and perhaps even neuroscientists to resolve those really difficult, challenging behaviors. And I really think we need these multiple behavioral disciplines to fully understand behavior and to be able to deal with the most difficult cases.

Speaker A [00:47:42]:

Yeah, that's a really good point.

Speaker C [00:47:45]:

And also another thing is I think that we also if we look at the world of animal training this last decade or so, it's been extremely focused on the behavior analytical perspective with the ABCs and what happens immediately before the behavior and what does the behavior look like and what happens immediately after. But now I think we're starting to see a trend shift where we're also moving away. We're taking a few steps back and we're looking at the animal's overall mood state, whether his emotional needs are met. Because if we can change the mood, we change perception and decision making and behavior. So sometimes that's all we need to do is change the mood and that unwanted behavior that's been annoying us so much that will just melt away.

Speaker D [00:48:33]:

Yeah, such a good point.

Speaker A [00:48:35]:

I think that is a shift and I think it's a good shift. It's a good shift for the guardians and it's a really good shift for dogs too.

Speaker C [00:48:42]:

Just to be clear, I'm not saying that we don't need the behavioral analytical perspective. I think we do. But I think that we need these multiple lenses to look at behavior through.

Speaker A [00:48:52]:

Yes, agreed. Agreed wholeheartedly. Thank you. That has been such an amazing discussion. I'm sure people are going to love it. And if you've got the end of this podcast episode and you haven't read the blog yet, make sure you check out the show notes because I will put the link to the blog in the show notes. And we'll also link to Carolina's website. She's got some fabulous courses that I just was chatting to Carolina before we started that I'm going to take one because her courses are so brilliant. So you can check out more of her blogs. You can check out her courses on her website too. So, Carolina, thank you so much for today. It's been an absolute pleasure.

Speaker C [00:49:29]:

Julie thank you for having me. It's been great.

Speaker B [00:49:34]:

Thank you so much for listening to this episode of the Be Right Back separation anxiety podcast. If you want to find out more about how I can help you further, head over to [Julienasmith.com](http://Julienasmith.com).

Meanwhile, if you enjoyed listening today, I would love it if you would head over to wherever you listen to your podcast and consider rating my show. Thanks so much. Good luck with that training, and bye for now.