

Response of the Association of Responsible Dog Owners (ARDO) in relation to 4 questions asked by Ladyfreethinker.org

ARDO have been approached by ladyfreethinker.org to provide our perspective on four questions (listed and answered in turn below). ARDO declare absolutely no pre-determination or any interests in providing anything other than answers based entirely on the questions asked; answers that are based on scientific evidence and/or empirically replicated best practice. We will not align ourselves with any media persecution of any individual (ad hominem attacks) or seek to 'fan the flames' of political or ideological agendas where the facts are sacrificed, biased, distorted, amplified or omitted in order to support or promote any such agendas. Consequently, ARDO's responses to any questions regarding animal welfare matters are not to be taken as 'evidence to support or discredit' individuals, businesses, organisations, actions or events, but rather to provide *our evidence-based perspective* on proposals, procedures or policies.

Question 1

1. Can you please tell us more about what ARDO defines as responsible use of electronic collars? For what types of behaviour should they be used? Can you please also tell us more about when dog owners can or should use the various settings (many have a vibrate and beep level to them, don't they?)

Responsible use of any training method, including electronic collars, improves a dog's welfare and quality of life. Examples would include:

It is neither possible nor appropriate to provide a list of behaviours for which electronic collars *should* be used, because every dog and its circumstances is unique. In broad terms, electronic collars should be used to help dogs where other training methods have failed, especially when the behaviour of the dog presents a significant risk to itself or others, or where a dog's quality of life is



compromised because, for example, it has to be confined or tethered all the time due to behaviour problems when it is running free.

‘When or how the tone or vibrate functions can or should be used’, also depends on the dog and its circumstances. Each feature *can* be used in different ways, from cueing and marking behaviours (clicking at distance), to communicating requirements for audibly or visually impaired dogs, or serving as aversive stimuli (depending upon the individual sensitivity of the dog).

Question 2

2. Are there any dangers in using an electronic collar on a dog? Should people be trained in how to use them before they use them with their dogs?

. Anything and everything can be dangerous if the intention of the user is to act in a dangerous manner, be that wilfully or recklessly. There is no evidence that electronic collars are any more dangerous to dog health, welfare and quality of life than any other training method. ARDO strongly encourages anyone who wants to train a dog to conduct as much research as possible beforehand into the methods they plan to use, no matter what that method is. Given that every dog is an individual and every specific situation is unique, we *strongly* encourage people to seek *direct* guidance from an appropriate professional with a proven track record of successfully training dogs and their owners.

Question 3

3. Does ARDO have any concerns about trainers virtually promoting the use of an electronic collar to individuals who may not have training or someone physically present to show them how to use the collar properly? Is there anything else you would like to say about whether dog owners can responsibly learn how to use an electronic collar virtually?

We presume that by “virtually” you mean over the internet. Countless e-books, videos and online advice articles exist and continue to be uploaded, advising dog owners on ‘how to’ use all kinds of training methods to train or modify



problematic behaviours with their dogs where neither the dog nor the owner have been seen directly by the “trainer” – this includes articles and books from veterinary organisations. It is inevitable that guidance or advice on the use of electronic training aids will appear online or in print, just as it is inevitable that many dog owners will seek out information relating to electronic training collars or any other training aid. [Any of the training methods advocated on the internet and in print can cause problems or be dangerously ineffective if applied incorrectly or with the wrong dog under the wrong circumstances.](#)

ARDO does not oppose the provision and availability of quality information that enables inexperienced or uninformed dog owners to further educate themselves in order to make more informed decisions. ARDO opposes anything and everything that promotes the abuse of any living being.

As to “whether dog owners can learn how to use an electronic collar virtually”, ARDO considers this to be primarily dependent on the depth and quality of the information provided and the individual characteristics, knowledge, competence and intentions of the teachers and the students.

Given that every dog is an individual and every specific situation unique, we *strongly* encourage people to seek *direct* guidance from an appropriate professional with a proven track record.

Question 4

ARDO have been requested to view and answer the following questions in relation to a YouTube video which we have viewed in its entirety. The video relates to the use of an electronic training collar to stop/deter a dog from entering a dishwasher. The justification given for the application of the electronic training collar in the video is to prevent the death of the dog as the trainer states “Your dog WILL die from getting into the dishwasher” [capitals denote emphasis used by trainer when making comment}. Also, the trainer states “Your dog turns around and bites you for walking up to the dishwasher; I get those phone calls every day”, therefore it is assumed that the process serves not only to save life, but to modify resource-related redirected aggression.

4a)

Is using an electronic collar to correct this demonstrated unwanted behaviour reasonable?

In determining the reasonableness of an action, we would encourage people to ask; is the procedure:

- Appropriate - is the action appropriate in the circumstances (have alternatives been tried and failed, or disregarded as being inappropriate, ineffective or too intrusive)?
- Proportionate - is the action proportionate in the circumstances (use forms part of a complete approach towards achieving a training outcome and is discontinued once the target behaviour or desired association is accomplished)?
- Necessary - does the action provide, improve or protect the welfare and quality of life of the dog (including the ability to safely exhibit 'normal' canine behaviour), the family unit, or society at large, including other animals?
- Does the action facilitate compliance with legal demands – for example that a dog is not dangerous to people or other animals?
- Does the action comply with animal welfare legislation?
- Is high-quality equipment that is fit for purpose being used?

In this particular video we believe that the procedure fails to satisfy the requirements for being 'Appropriate'. There is no mention nor demonstration to suggest that the far less invasive, arguably more appropriate and effective alternative of *closing the dishwasher after opening* has been considered and disregarded as being knowingly inappropriate, ineffective or too intrusive.

4b)

The dog is heard to yelp in this video: Is there anything you can tell us about at what level the electronic collar was likely used, based on the dog's observable behaviour, and whether that observable behaviour could likely be attributed to pain or to a startle response?

The trainer answers this question at 13:58 by saying "Probably I think it was around a 50". We have no reason to disbelieve the trainer. Without knowing

the individual dog, which is impossible from watching one video, it is not possible to judge whether it was startled or momentarily subject of a painful episode.

4C)

The trainer says in the video that he is not "setting the dog up to fail"; those who have spoken out against the video have said otherwise, alleging that most individuals do not lead their dogs to their dishwashers, in which there are full plates of food presented horizontally at a dog's eye level.

Our interpretation is that the trainer is following a standard ABC conditioning protocol; simply put - the dog needs to be given an opportunity to do something in order for that behaviour to be reinforced or punished it. Leading the dog to the dishwasher was an alternative to waiting for it to go there itself, in either case the outcome would have been the same; a consequence resulting in a dog choosing not to climb into the dishwasher thereafter.

4D)

Is there anything you can share about what is going on in this video and whether this would be a responsible way for dog owners to stop their dogs from sniffing at their plates? Or alternately, is there anything else you can say about what responsible training would have involved to stop the unwanted behaviour of a dog sniffing a plate in the dishwasher?

Simply closing the dishwasher door or restricting access to the kitchen itself would be better, less intrusive yet equally effective options.

ENDS