

Ask the Trainer

By Sharon Harvey

I've taken my dog through several obedience classes and have been advised to use a different type of collar by each instructor—flat, choke, prong, head halter. What type of collar do you recommend?

Ah, as our Shelter Manager says, you've entered the Great Collar Debate! If there's one thing you need to remember it's this, whichever collar you choose—it will not train your dog to walk nicely on leash. That's your job. And you should do this using the collar that's the safest and least aversive. Think of the collar and leash as being primarily for safety and secondarily for training. Having said that, there are dogs and situations that may require additional support from the training equipment, but only when all non-compulsive methods have failed.

Limited Slip or Martingale Collar—highly recommended. If the dog pulls, it allows limited tightening around the neck; so, if fitted properly, it's secure but won't cause harmful airway constriction. However, if fitted too tightly, it could cause injury to the airway if the leash is tightened. When used and fitted correctly, this collar offers the best combination of safety and control while still being humane in use.

Flat or Buckle Collar—recommended. If the dog pulls, pressure will be exerted on his airway and neck but the collar does not tighten and constrict the airway so there is limited risk for injury. Some dogs may be able to back out of the collar and escape, even if it is correctly fitted. This collar does not offer much control for large, powerful or excitable dogs. Best for very well trained, calm, well socialized, easy to handle dogs.

Head Halter (i.e. Gentle Leader, Halti)—recommended. The head halter does not put pressure on the dog's neck but, rather, controls him by guiding his head. However, if the leash is jerked, the dog could suffer neck injury. It has a varying affect on dogs—some never adapt, others experience a calming effect. Fitting and use require practice and the dog must be given time and positive reinforcement to adapt to the halter. This is the next step for dogs who have not responded to training on buckle or martingale collars.



Prong Collar—very conditionally recommended.

This collar applies uniform pressure around the dog's neck and will not constrict the airway. However, the metal prongs could injure the dog. It is an aversive training tool that works by inflicting pain. It should ONLY be used when ALL other training methods have been exhausted, when other collars (like the head halter) have failed AND the future of the dog is at risk. It should only be used until the desired result has been achieved. Positive reinforcement MUST be a part of the training program. It is NOT intended for everyday use and should not be worn except when training. In some cases, it might worsen aggression.

Choke or Slip Collar—not recommended.

When improperly used, any pulling on the leash will cause unlimited tightening of the collar and resultant airway constriction, possibly leading to injury or death. Correct use involves excellent timing and reflexes as well as the use of aversive training methods that should be avoided unless ALL other positive training methods have been exhausted. Even as an aversive, this collar often isn't effective as many dogs aren't impressed by the punishment. These collars are unsafe when left on an unsupervised dog.

If you're having a problem with your cat or dog, call the Rescue Village Helpline at 440.338.4819, ext. 13 or send an e-mail to askthetrainer@geaugahumane.org. We'll help you solve your problem or refer you to someone who can. The most frequently asked questions will find their way into the Rescue Village Reporter's Ask the Trainer column or onto Q104's Ask the Trainer radio segment that can be heard on Sunday's Wilde & Fee Morning Show during the 8 o'clock hour.

Our Mission

To shelter and find homes for sick, injured, abused, and abandoned domestic animals that have no other alternatives

To foster compassion for all living things through education

To reduce pet overpopulation through spay/neuter programs

To prevent cruelty by advocating and enforcing animal protection laws