



The Use of Aversives to Correct a Dog's Unwanted Behaviors

RAOT is not a big advocate of the use of an aversive in dog training; however, we realize that aversives are sometimes the only way to address certain problems. An aversive should ONLY be used as a last resort, after all else has failed to achieve the desired results, assuming the result expected are reasonable, and, then, only if the aversive involves the minimum aversive necessary to compel a behavior.

Finding the right aversive to use on your dog is a matter of trial-and-error. We are not going to address the type of corrections used for training normal obedience commands, only those used to correct unwanted behaviors like counter-surfing, digging, and barking. Some circumstances require a higher level aversive than others. Further, each dog is an individual so the level of aversive will also vary from dog to dog. In any event, if your discourage a dog from doing something, you should offer your dog a positive alternative.

To keep a puppy, small dogs or low energy dogs off the cabinets, furniture or tables, you can try shelf paper with the sticky side up or double-sided carpet tape. (Do not use tape on surfaces that these products may damage. Cover the table with heavy plastic and then put the shelf paper or carpet tape on top of that.) Adults, larger dogs and high energy dogs may actually turn fighting with the sticky paper or tape into a "game." For them, you may want to try an aluminum pie plate with water or rocks in it balanced precariously on the edge of the table and/or short pieces of 1 by 1 board taped along the edge of the table with as light a tape as possible or using thread attached to heavier tape. The object is to angle the board so that it is hanging off the very edge so it would fall except the tape or thread holding it and ANY weight the dog adds with its foot or whatever, makes the pan or board fall and surprise the dog, hopefully, discouraging the dog from repeating the act.

If your dog is destroying things in the yard, you might want to try ringing any objects that your dog is prone to destroy with sharp rocks in irregular shapes set firmly in the dirt. Alternatively, you may want to use tent stakes to tie-down chicken wire (with any sharp edges rolled under) around the object.

Sometimes a heavy plastic carpet runner with the pointed side up will discourage a dog from crossing over it to get to an object. This technique can be used inside or out.

Another possible deterrent is through a dog's sense of taste. You can try many products as an aversive. Ready-made products, like Bitter Apple or similar sprays and gels are marketed specifically for dog taste aversion. Citronella sprays and other citrus products, hot sauces, cayenne pepper, and some muscle rubs like Ben-Gay are also effective.

WARNING! Be sure the product is safe for human use if you plan to apply it to someone's skin. Be sure that any product that you use is safe for use on your dog. It is also important to realize that some of these products may damage furniture, floor finishes, or materials. Be sure to test them where the damage will not be noticeable if it occurs before wide-spread use of the product.

Another type of aversive is the use of surprise to startle your dog and get its attention. For instance, you might use a spray bottle or squirt gun filled with water or water and vinegar. Avoid the water guns that shoot a very forceful spray as it could hurt your dog if it gets in your dog's ears, eyes or nose. You might try using one of those air horns, like clowns use, or a whistle to startle your dog. And, of course, there is the "shaker can," which you use by throwing it immediately behind, not at, the dog. (Make a shaker can by using a soda can with several pieces of metal inside and tape it shut securely on the end. Use as little tape as possible so as not to muffle the sound.) Finally, there is the Ultrasonic Remote Trainer sold on radiofence.com. This handy, hand-held device corrects your pet using a startling ultrasonic sound, unpleasant to the dog but inaudible to the human ear. (One note about this device, sometimes it does not work at first but, generally, if you use it, then put it up for 10 to 14 days, and then use it again, it is more effective than ever!)

ANOTHER WARNING! If your dog is a fearful dog, try everything else possible before using any of the surprise techniques, especially those that make loud noises.