

England Banned Shock Collars, Here's Why That Could Be Sad News

Speaker Key

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Transcript

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You may have heard the news that the country of England has put forth legislation that as of February 2024 would effectively ban the use of shock collars in the country. And I think that's sad for many reasons. Now with one sentence, I pretty much have annoyed the majority of dog trainers out there. I'm going to share with you why I think it's sad, and I will acknowledge that I think it's kind of good as well.

But I'm going to share that anybody who uses an electric collar is now livid with me because I called it a shock collar. And you've got to question, why is that so triggering. Because I recognize the word E-collar takes away the image to the lay public or to any dog owner that we might be giving an electrical current to a dog's neck in order to train them.

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And before you get crazy angry with me and say, 'I don't know what I'm talking about, you're just stimming and you're just communicating', think about walking across the floor in the wintertime. If you are from a country that doesn't have a lot of humidity in the air, when you walk across a carpeted floor in particular and you go to hand somebody say the remote control, there is going to be an electrical charge that is going to be transferred from you to the other person and you both will feel it.

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And what do we call that people? We call that a shock. Nobody is like knocked off their feet. A shock doesn't have to be something overwhelming. When you give your dog electrical stimulation, you might be giving them a small shock or a large shock. And no matter how you dress it up, it's still a tool that relies on the dog being afraid or intimidated of the pain.

Now as I see it, there's three groups of people that use an electric collar. Those dog trainers that might be championship level dog trainers that they might be as good a dog trainer as I am. They choose to train with an electric collar. There would be a group of dog trainers below that group that might be people who are pet owners or are dog trainers themselves that are trying to learn possibly from the people above how to use these tools effectively.

And then there's a group below that group, which I'm going to call the uneducated using this tool sometimes as a weapon. Oftentimes very, very poorly. And so how would each of these groups use an electric collar on their dog?

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Well, I'm not going to talk about the highest level until the end, but the uneducated group, I'll give you an example. Just this morning somebody on my team said, "I was talking to my neighbor. She had an electric collar on her dog. And she said it's because the dog had started growling at her young child."

Why train? Let's just slap an electric collar on the dog. But what people don't know is that an electric collar used in that way can often cause what's called redirection so that the dog actually may have a [higher probability of biting](#) the child.

People don't like it when their dog growls at children but go to [podcast number 157](#), then you'll see where I talked about a growl is just an animal communicating their emotions to us.



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And if you zap the growl, you take away the opportunity for that [animal to communicate](#). The only communication they have left is biting. On the outside it may look like something's working, but it could be just a time bomb waiting to end very, very badly.

So, the uneducated, they will use an electric collar very, very badly. They can cause pain, very strong pain to a dog for as long as 11 straight seconds. Now you can buy an electric collar from Amazon. You can pay \$35 up to \$250.

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So, giving out this tool to people who just want their dog to stop what they're doing, they don't necessarily want a better relationship with the dog. They just want the dog to stop. And that is just a recipe for potential disaster. But definitely it's a recipe for a lot of angst and pain and emotional upset for the poor dog that's getting this put on them.

Which is why Petco, a chain of pet stores in the United States and Canada back in 2020 decided that they would no longer sell E-collars in their store. Now at the time, the annual sales from E-collars from one chain of pet stores was 10 million dollars. Now as I mentioned today three years later, you can get an electric collar for \$39. So, if they were selling mostly \$39 electric collars, some were upwards of 200,000 E-collars that were sold by one chain.

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Now, even if the average price of the E-collar was \$150, that's still like 70,000 E-collars a year being sold by one chain, and how many are sold on Amazon. So, there's a lot of these tools being floated around. Yes, some people using them very well. Some people rarely, if ever having to give their dog much more than a little tap on the shoulder, but a lot of them using them very, very badly.

Now you could say that "Why don't we just legislate the electric collar so that only certain people can use them?" And that might be something if I was an E-collar user, I might be out there rallying the troops to try and get that kind of legislation put in place before something like what happened in England has happened.

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But why did I say off the top that I think it's kind of sad? It's sad because number one, bans potentially could be a slippery slope. Did you know that once you start banning a tool to train your dog, there may be a lot of others that follow. For example, the country of Sweden doesn't allow a dog to be in [a kennel or a crate](#) in the home.

They can be kenneled in a vet clinic but not in the home which I think is crazy. Because how does the dog get used to be comfortable and confident and not have anxiety when they get to a vet clinic if they're not used to a kennel or a crate in the home? But I digress. The point is the legislation has a potential to be sad because it could be a slippery slope.

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It could start and end with an E-collar, but there's a potential that it won't. Number two is, what is the training tool that these trainers that are using electric collars, what is the training tool they're going to next?

Because they have a methodology, based on the story they tell themselves about dogs. I mean, how I train my dogs is based on the stories I tell myself about dogs.



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You as a podcast listener, you've heard me say it many, many times, that I believe that dogs are doing the best they can with the education that we've given them in the environment that we're asking them to do any behavior.

So, if we take a young puppy and we put them out where there's livestock, there's a very good chance they might chase a livestock.

And so, people would say, see if they had an E-collar, they'd be able to stop that.

But common sense would say, how about we build a relationship and get some really good training before we take that puppy off leash in your backyard?

And if the puppy doesn't come back in the backyard, we're not letting them off leash in environment with other animals around, right?

Like that's common sense.

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So, my challenge is we haven't changed the thinking. We haven't helped the people who feel the need to use electric collars and other tools to create pain in a dog.

We haven't changed their thinking. So, they're going to go to another tool if you take away their electric collars and there's a lot of tools far more nasty.

Now, I don't think that's a reason that they should be using them.

But my main reason why I think this is sad because it means we failed as a community of dog loving dog trainers. We have failed. Because when dog training fails what do we do? We use management.

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If we haven't been able to train our dog not to [steal food from the counter](#), then we will put the dog in another room when we go out. Or if we haven't trained the dog to not steal food from the garbage, what do we do? We put the garbage can up on the counter so the dog can't get it.

We use management when we failed to educate. And I believe as a community, regardless of how you choose to train, the communication between us has broken down so that the stories that I'm telling myself and the stories that others that feel the need to use E-collars are telling themselves are so entrenched, that there is no way they could possibly even consider what we're doing.

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We failed. Communications haven't been happening in a way that have been productive. People aren't being heard.

Now, the E-collar side of the fence may be saying, "Well, you're not listening to us either." But we're not training in a way that's causing dogs discomfort.

So, let's look at the very top level of the people using electric collars. What would be the reason?

Now they would say to me, "Oh well, if dogs are off leash around livestock, they might cause injury, so we've got to have dogs availability to have electric collars." Or "If I'm working in my high-level protection sport, the dog gets so hyped up that I need an electric collar to make sure that I get them to listen to me when I ask them to do something." Or "I use an electric collar when there's dog-dog aggression in my home."



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Those are the biggies that I get told. But why is it that people like me who've had dogs for 30 years, very intense dogs, have never felt the need to use an electric collar?

And even if it was true that your dogs are different and your sport is more intense, what right do you have in the name of a sport to earn a ribbon or a medal?

What right do you have to cause pain to get your dog to do what you want to do when there are other people competing in your sport doing it without electric collars.

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Now you could say, and I've been told, "Well, they're not getting the high scores that I am." So, it is now the electric collar is justified by you getting better scores. Does that make sense? Because I've got to ask you, do you believe dogs have emotions? Do you believe dogs may have anxieties? Do you believe dogs have fears?

Do you believe it's right to use pain to reach a dog when they're feeling emotional or [feeling anxious or in fear](#)?

Because most of us would say, "That would just be akin to torture." That we reach dogs in a heightened emotional state not through pain but through understanding. And so, if we do believe, I'm hoping if you're listening to this, we acknowledge that [dogs do have emotions](#), they have fears, they have anxieties.

And what they need from us in those times is the greatest understanding, the greatest compassion, the greatest patience we could ever muster up, and then a great training plan to move forward.

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So those of you who are at the top level using these electric collars, are you using them on your own dogs? And I would imagine you are, because that's how you get good at a tool. Then why if it's used for teaching a dog not to chase livestock or teaching my dogs not to fight with each other, why can't you do what the rest of us do?

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You are as good a dog trainer as the rest of us. You're an elite at what you do. Can't you just lay down the collar? I know you use reinforcement. I know you do. But why with your own dogs, not your client's dogs. With your own dogs if you are that good of a dog trainer, which I believe you are. And you feel you can't get the results, maybe it's because you haven't taken the correct approach.

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I'm challenging all of you out there. Any of you who are still listening, if I haven't annoyed you so badly that you're not going to listen. But the truth is, to be really good at dog training using reinforcement, you just have to become aware of [what's reinforcing your dog](#). And it's a change of the story you've been telling yourself.

This might not be a popular podcast for a lot of people to listen to, but it's one that I feel we all need to be better for our dogs and we all need to be better for each other.

For those uneducated who think dogs should be controlled, should comply, should do what we want regardless of our relationship just because we are bigger, stronger, smarter. We need to educate that community of people.



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And for those of you who are excelling using an electric collar, I want to challenge you to consider the [reinforcement you're using](#) and you're telling me 95% of what you do is reinforcement.

Potentially the reinforcement you're using isn't the same reinforcement the rest of us are using who are not needing an electric collar to get that last 5%.

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Putting that out there is a possibility, because the only way we truly do our best for dogs is when we can come together as a collective and really inspire the world to be at the best for the dogs that we love.

I hope this makes sense to you. I'd love to hear what you think. And wouldn't it be great if the sales of electric collars just suddenly started decreasing instead of constantly increasing.

I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.

Resources:

[YouTube Playlist: Dog Bite Prevention with Susan Garrett](#)

[Podcast Episode 157: Dog Body Language: Understanding Canine Communication Signals And Emotions](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Dog Body Language, Communication Signals, and How to Read Dogs with Susan Garrett](#)

[Podcast Episode 30: Why Dog Crates Are Not Dog Cages](#)

[Podcast Episode 33: How Do I Stop My Dog Counter Surfing?!](#)

[Podcast Episode 168: Creating Confidence For Anxious, Stressed Or Reactive Dogs Part 1](#)

[YouTube Playlist: The Emotional State of Dogs with Susan Garrett](#)

[Podcast Episode 196: Why Mastering Reinforcement Is The Linchpin To Reinforcement Based Dog Training](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Mastery of Positive Reinforcement Based Dog Training with Susan Garrett](#)



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About Susan

A world-leading educator of dog trainers, Susan is also one of the most successful agility competitors of the last three decades. She has won multiple Gold Medals at National or World Championship events with every dog she has ever owned over the past 30 years. Susan was one of the very first dog trainers to share knowledge online when she opened her "Clicker Dogs" website many years ago. Susan has helped hundreds of thousands of people enjoy a great relationship with their dogs through her workshops and keynote speaking around the world, award winning books, DVDs, magazine articles, blog posts, podcasts, free dog training and dog agility video series, and online dog training programs.



A natural teacher and an entertaining speaker, Susan is world renowned for her dog training knowledge and practical application of that knowledge. Her understanding of how to apply science-based learning principles to both competitive and family pet dog training has been pivotal in changing how dogs are trained.

Susan is now helping many thousands of dog owners in 82 countries have the best relationship possible with their dogs. The real joy for her comes from bringing confidence to dogs and their owner through playful interactions and relationship building games that are grounded firmly in the science of how animals learn.



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