PUNISHMENT
WHAT THE SCIENCE TELLS US

To completely eradicate an **undesirable** behaviour through punishment, it would need to be delivered **in the act, immediately, and at a level significant enough** to the individual dog to stop the behaviour.

The problem? Every dog has a different level of tolerance, and punishment is often not perfectly timed or consistent, so it just becomes confusing noise.

GO TOO HIGH
It can do more harm than good.

- Can create fear, anxiety or a nervous dog.
- Dog may appear "well behaved", but only because they are afraid of getting it wrong.
- Can create negative associations — what did the dog actually connect the punishment with?
- Can damage the relationship with the handler.
- Can increase other unwanted behaviours, including avoidance, shutdown or defensive aggression.



GO TOO LOW
It can backfire.

- Can accidentally reinforce the behaviour simply because you are acknowledging it.
- Talking, chasing, grabbing, "Ah-ah!", "No!" etc. can all become attention.
- If timing is poor or inconsistent, it often just becomes confusing noise.



"GUILTY LOOK"?

- Most of the time, they have no idea what they have done if you haven't caught them in the act.
- Dogs are incredibly good at reading our mood and body language.
- They know we are upset/angry/frustrated, but not necessarily what they did.
- What we often interpret as guilt is usually appeasement behaviour — trying to make the situation move on.



"AH-AH" / "NO"

- May pause or interrupt a behaviour.
- But what does "No" actually mean?
- "No" is a concept, not a behaviour.
- Dogs understand behaviours, not words.
- Punishment may stop behaviour in the moment, but it does not teach what to do instead.



DOGS ARE DOGS

- Many unwanted behaviours are actually normal species-specific behaviours.
- Chewing, biting, digging, barking, jumping, grabbing and exploring with their mouth are natural dog behaviours.



BEHAVIOUR HAS A FUNCTION

- Instead of seeing behaviour as good or bad, ask what function it serves.
- Your job is to work out why the dog is doing it.
- Possible reasons include boredom, stress, teething, over-arousal, lack of skills, or normal development.



CHOICE, NOT FEAR

- We want the dog to do the behaviour because they want to, not because they are afraid of what will happen if they don't.
- If you have to get angry at your dog, look at the teaching.
- Have we actually shown them what we want them to do instead?



With any unwanted behaviour, stop for a second and ask yourself...

DOES IT REALLY MATTER?