

# Gundog Club Training Methods

## FAQ on Proposed Changes

The Gundog Club proposes to implement a decision to support force-free training from September 2018. The Gundog Club has provided the following information for gundog trainers, Gundog Club students and members of the public.

### **What are the proposed changes?**

The Gundog Club has always insisted on 'no harsh handling' but the Trustees have now decided that the Club should take the next step and move to a rule that insists on its instructors training without any force at all.

By no force at all, we mean no:

- Intimidation (including body postures, body blocking, 'stares', growling, scolding, shouting)
- Physical manipulation (including lead jerks, lifting, pulling, pushing, alpha rolls, ear tugs and tweaks)
- Striking (including nose taps, smacking, hitting, kicking)
- Sound aversives (including rattle bottles, pet correctors, or other forms of compressed air)
- Electric collars

Some of these already fall under the heading of 'harsh handling'. Please note that this list is not inclusive. These are examples. The essential point is that force-free trainers use no force at all.

### **Why is the Gundog Club making this change**

You can find a full explanation of the reasons behind this decision in Pippa Mattinson's personal statement. The statement will be available on the Gundog Club's website. This decision brings the Gundog Club into line with other dog training organisations and dog welfare bodies across the UK.

### **How will dogs be disciplined or corrected?**

Force-free trainers don't use corrections. Force-free training requires a special set of skills which will be taught to our students by skilled force-free

instructors. We will be providing information on the techniques and methods involved on our new website from September

### **Won't this result in spoiled, disobedient gundogs?**

Many people confuse positive or force-free gundog training with permissive training. And it is important to get this distinction clear because gundog training is a serious business. Gundogs are working around people holding loaded guns, and are responsible for the recovery of wounded game. Any methods used in gundog training must be reliable and effective.

Fortunately we know that it is possible to train a gundog to a high degree of reliability and effectiveness without force. We now have clicker trained FTCH retrievers, and HPRs and spaniels that are succeeding in working tests. Training a hunting dog force-free is a little more challenging than retriever training, but the evidence is now clear. Force free training is possible. You can find more information on this topic in our document "The Evidence For Force Free Training"

### **Will some gundogs be excluded from GC Field Tests**

No, while the Gundog Club supports force free training and will only accredit force-free instructors, traditionally trained dogs will still be able to enter the tests and work through the Graded Training Scheme

### **What do the changes mean for GC instructors?**

Some of our instructors are already force free trainers, and there will be no change for them. Some instructors will decide to leave the Gundog Club and of course we will be sad to lose long standing colleagues and supporters of the Club but this is an unavoidable consequence of the change. Some might decide to convert to force free training, and we will work with any instructor who wishes to do so to try to work out a way they can meet the new requirements.

It is important to note that training without force requires an entirely different set of skills to training with force, it's not the case that traditional trainers have these skills even though they may be extremely skilled in the methods they currently use. But if any traditional trainer wishes to move to force-free, they will have our full support.

## **I'm currently a student enrolled on a course with a Gundog Club instructor who isn't a force-free trainer – so where does this leave me?**

The changes will not happen until September 2018, in 6 months, so current courses should be unaffected.

## **Is my current trainer going to stop running Gundog Club courses?**

If your current trainer isn't a force-free trainer, and they don't wish to become one, they can no longer be listed as accredited by The Gundog Club. But you can still train with them if you choose, and can still take the Gundog Club tests.

## **Will this leave you without enough trainers to run the Graded Scheme?**

It will be problematic for a while until we recruit more force-free trainers. We hope, now the Club has made the move, that more force-free trainers will join us.

In the meantime, there are several things we can do to ease the difficulties of finding an assessor – including organising set days in various locations where students can take tests. We may also decide to extend our current video assessment options.

## **I'm not a force free trainer and I'm upset that you think I would treat a dog harshly or be cruel to a dog**

When we say 'force free' we mean training without any punishment.

When we say punishment we are talking in behavioural terms and 'punishment' has a much more specific meaning than the emotive one that can be easily attached to the word.

Strictly speaking, punishment is anything which happens to, or around, a dog that makes his behaviour less likely to be repeated. The crucial factor is: did the dog find this event unpleasant? If he did, then the 'unpleasantness' of the event will 'punish' (make it less likely to be repeated) his behaviour.

Many dog trainers use punishment in the form of mild aversives - growling at a dog if it runs in for example. So they do apply consequences to a dog's behaviour that the dog finds aversive and this is a form of punishment.

So many forms of punishment are very mild and do not physically harm the dog. But the Gundog Club believes it is more effective and better for dogs to be

trained with positive reinforcement – for the reasons set out in the document ‘evidence for positive reinforcement training’.

## **I think I meet your definition of a force free trainer but I’m not on the Gundog Club’s force free list. What happens now?**

Your Gundog credentials would have been checked when you first joined the Gundog Club. So, in order to meet our new requirements (and be included on our force free accredited list) you need to provide evidence that the way you teach students to train their dog meets our definition of force free.

This can take the form of:

- Existing accreditation of an organisation with the same definition as us;  
or
- Two student references (please provide contact details) who can confirm that your training methods match our definition of force free.
- As a reminder, our definition of force free, training without any force at all. By no force at all, we mean no:
  - Intimidation (including body postures, body blocking, ‘stares’, growling, scolding, shouting)
  - Physical manipulation (including lead jerks, lifting, pulling, pushing, alpha rolls, ear tugs and tweaks)
  - Striking (including nose taps, smacking, hitting, kicking)
  - Sound aversives (including rattle bottles, pet correctors, or other forms of compressed air)
  - Electric collars

These are examples. The essential point is that force-free trainers use no force at all.

The business planning committee Trustee group will consider the evidence received and make a decision whether to accredit you as a force free gundog trainer on our list.

## **I’m not a force free trainer, but interested in becoming one**

We suggest that the first thing to do is to fully understand the implications of training a Gundog force free - one of the existing established force free Gundog instructors might help you with this. You can contact them directly or via us. There are also some online courses that might help – Denise Fenzi’s dog sports academy for example. If there are enough trainers that express an interest in this, the Gundog Club could look at arranging something specific for those who are interested.

The material we provided in the evidence document provides you with a list of studies that explains the downsides of using aversives in dog training. These should be useful to you and should give you the start of a good reading list – of course there are many, many books available on positive reinforcement training.

In May this year, the Positive Gundog conference may assist you in making contact with other force free Gundog trainers.

Once you have established how far you would have to change your methods to cross over to being force free, and implement this in your training, then you can reapply to us to be reaccredited as a force free trainer.