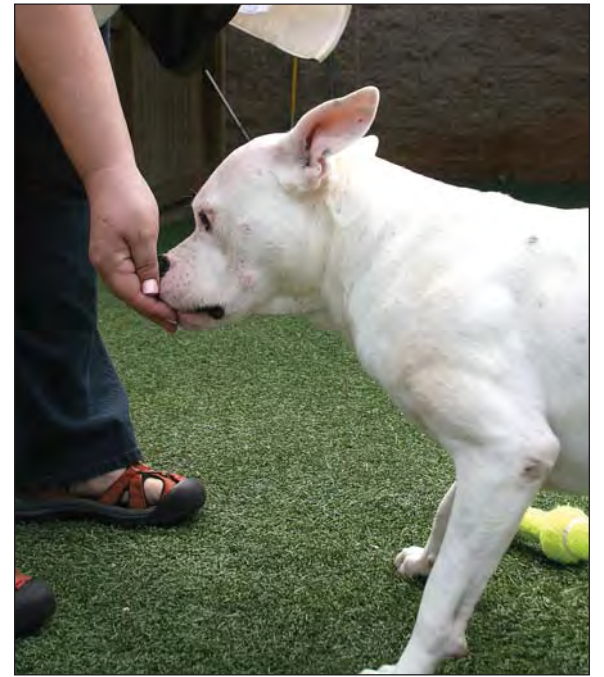


# Pet Behavior

## MOLLY EXPLAINS WHY A DOG DOESN'T NEED TO BE KICKED, BEATEN OR HUNG TO LEARN A COMMAND

**Below:** Molly uses the object trade method – exchanging a more desirable item for the one the dog currently possesses – to teach Marceau the “release” command. Marceau (an American Bulldog with a vice-like grip and a high-drive temperament) learns the “release” command without being hung, strangled, swung, or kicked.



(As of July 20, Marceau is still available for adoption!)

[Editor's Note: In Sept. 2007, NC State Trooper Charles Jones was fired for abusing his police dog during a training session – a fellow officer had filmed the incident. Jones sued the state to get his job back and in April 2008 the case was heard and the video released to the public. On the stand Jones defended hanging and kicking methods as routine police dog training. The SPCA of Wake County spoke out against the reinstatement of Jones and recommended felony animal cruelty charges be filed against him.]



**Molly Stone**  
SPCA Behavior Specialist

The video of former NC State Trooper Charles Jones brutally hanging and kicking his canine partner horrified everyone who saw it.

Jones' behavior was abusive, excessive, unnecessary, unkind, inexcusable, frightening...the list goes on and on.

I agree with every descriptor on that list, and in fact, I could probably add more controversial and far less appropriate (but no less accurate!) adjectives of my own if space and decency allowed.

But what may be the most despicable aspect of the whole situation hasn't gotten a lot of attention so far, so I'd like to point it out here. The training session we all watched in horror wasn't simply brutal. It was worse than that. The training session we all watched in horror was brutal – *and pointless.*

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In animal training, there are rules regarding the effective application of reinforcers and punishers and those rules apply to any situation where an animal is expected to learn.

It does not matter that the dog in question was

undergoing training specific to police dogs. Of course police dogs are special. Of course they're different from my couch-jockey Golden Retriever. Of course they're expected to perform more difficult tasks for much higher stakes than my neighbor's Chihuahua.

Police dog training is necessarily intense – but that does not mean it must necessarily be cruel, and it does not mean that the people performing it can ignore the laws of learning.

During any dog training, *reinforcers* are applied to increase the occurrence of desirable behaviors and *punishers* are applied to decrease the occurrence of undesirable behaviors. In order for learning to take place, reinforcers and punishers must **immediately follow** the behaviors they're supposed to be associated with, or that association will not take place. This is one of the simplest tenets of conditioning and it is among the first things neophyte animal trainers are taught.

Charles Jones' dog, Ricoh, refused to relinquish a chew toy. Charles Jones responded by taking the time to secure Ricoh's lead around a high rail in order to hang him nearly off the ground, an exercise which took several seconds.

Only then was Jones ready to return to his dog and apply the punishing kicks he doled out – far too late for Ricoh to have stood a snowball's chance of learning anything.

In order for an animal to learn through punishment, the punisher must be applied so that the animal **isn't aware that his trainer caused it.** This is known as a *clean association clause.* Without it, the animal being trained is likelier to learn not to repeat a particular behavior again in front of his trainer than he is to learn never to repeat the behavior again.

For example, if you'd like your puppy to stop chewing your shoes, you can try catching your

puppy in the act of shoe-chewing and scolding him sharply, or even spanking him, for it. It's possible that your puppy will learn not to chew shoes anymore, but if he did, he'd have experienced learning by luck. What happens to scolded, spanked puppies more frequently is that they learn that *you are scary and not to be trusted,* and that chewing shoes in front of you takes all the fun out of it. Those puppies choose to chew shoes “in private.”

On the other hand, if you consistently apply a strong taste deterrent to your shoes, eventually your puppy will find that they are unpleasant things to have in his mouth, and he will choose to leave your shoes alone. It won't matter whether you happen to be in the room or not, because he will think that shoe-chewing is, in short, just gross. He won't know that you made the shoes gross and that won't matter. He will simply learn what you wanted him to learn... “Please don't eat my Ferragamos.”

During his videotaped training session, Charles Jones didn't bother with a clean association clause. Ricoh knew exactly who was hurting him and therefore, during that session, he learned a lot more about his so-called “partner” than he could possibly have learned about “release.”

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Coercion-based animal training can sometimes be effective, but even when it is, serious fallout can result from its application.

At best, trainers who rely on pain and fear as primary motivators risk the safety of the animals they work with, the safety of the people who handle those animals, and the safety of the people who are exposed to them.

At worst, they are simply brutalizing animals for no reason at all, because learning cannot take place when the laws of conditioning are not followed, and coercive training techniques sometimes prioritize machismo and bravado over science. 🐾

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What about Charles Jones?

Although the judge hearing the case recommended that Jones be reinstated as a state trooper, a final decision has not been reached by the state.

Although a controversial decision, the judge was left with little choice given the loophole in the NC general statutes that allows for any extent of cruelty if it is in pursuit of training. The current cruelty law is inadequate, the loophole should be closed and the law updated to better protect our animals.

The state has since suspended Highway Patrol K-9 operations. But in early July the SPCA learned Jones had been hired by the Apex Police Department.

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Read about the well-documented link between animal abuse and interpersonal violence and more online at [www.spcawake.org/watchdogs](http://www.spcawake.org/watchdogs).



## Your Voice Matters!

Be a watchdog for the animals of Wake County and beyond.

You asked the SPCA to speak out on the state trooper dog abuse case and we did! Learn what else we are doing so that together we can be powerful advocates for the animals. Check out the SPCA's Citizen Advocate Center. Get updates on issues that are important to you and find out how **your voice truly matters.**

Current and past **Advocacy Alerts** can be found at the Citizen Advocate Resource Center. Visit: [www.spcawake.org/watchdogs](http://www.spcawake.org/watchdogs)