

APDTNZ Press Release

Released: 23 January 2020

Proposed Jeff Gellman seminar in New Zealand 2020

The Association of Pet Dog Trainers New Zealand Inc (APDTNZ) has released the attached Position Statement in relation to an impending visit by Mr. Jeff Gellman, a United States based dog trainer who intends to come to New Zealand in 2020 to conduct a dog training seminar in Auckland.

The APDTNZ contends that a number of Mr. Gellman's training methods amount to animal abuse and cruelty. Our members deal on a daily basis with the fallout of those owners and trainers who utilise punitive punishment methods. They are concerned that should Mr. Gellman teach and demonstrate his methods in New Zealand, it will further validate and perpetuate the old fashioned myth that a heavy hand is required to train an animal and that hitting or hurting a dog is an appropriate way to teach a behaviour.

Video of the type of behaviour that Mr. Gellman promotes can be found in the link below

<https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/news/local/perth-kinross/1070936/video-anger-as-us-dog-trainer-who-hit-dog-on-camera-announces-perthshire-seminar/>

Mr. Gellman's theory regarding his "bonking" method is not supported by any reputable animal behaviourist and as stated in our position statement, is fundamentally dangerous. There are many appropriately peer reviewed studies confirming that abusive training methods can inhibit the normal warning signals that animals give when they are stressed or afraid. Often the outcome is that when the animal reaches its tolerance threshold, a full-on defence response is initiated. This is the reason that so many dogs resort to snapping or biting "out of the blue".

Mr. Gellman's approach of placing the dogs in a situation that they find stressful then inflicting pain and frightening them so that they shut down does not provide a reliable long-term behaviour changing outcome and destroys the bond between dog and owner.

Mr. Gellman's claims that people come to him as a last resort to fix their dogs as an alternative to euthanising them is marketing hype to provide some justification for the extreme methods he promotes. He seduces owners who are struggling with normal dog behaviours with the lure of a quick fix verses the emotional weight of them thinking they need to put their dog to sleep.

All of the issues Mr. Gellman's method is supposed to address can be managed, and behaviour improved, through more humane, force free means. These are the same means that are utilised successfully by progressive domestic animal and wild animal trainers worldwide.

Behaviour is complex and is driven by the many different internal and external factors relevant to that animal in that situation. Fixing an undesirable behaviour is not a simple as just

correcting one behaviour on one single occasion. Mr. Gellman's subsequent claim that "I fixed the problem in one second with a cotton towel" indicates his lack of understanding of behaviour modification.

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As the established national New Zealand body representing progressive dog trainers, the Association of Pet Dog Trainers New Zealand Inc (APDTNZ) is unable to support or agree with the training methods used and taught by Jeff Gellman of Solid K9 Training.

Mr. Gellman of Solid K9 Training in Rhode Island is scheduled to travel to Auckland for a two-day workshop on July 4th and 5th, 2020 as a part of an international tour. His intention is to promote methods that include the use of electronic collars, prong collars, dominant (choke) collars and aversive punishment techniques, among other outdated and non evidence-based methodologies of animal training and behaviour.

A video has surfaced recently of Mr. Gellman hitting a dog with a tightly rolled towel over the head with his full force at a similar workshop last August. This is a technique that Mr. Gellman has coined as “Bonking”. In this video, and in a subsequent video where he attempts to explain his reasoning for his actions, Mr. Gellman’s lack of understanding of learning theory is further demonstrated which has resulted in the unsubstantiated and dangerous training techniques practiced by Mr. Gellman.

It is obvious from reviewing the video that when Mr. Gellman “bonks” the dog, he himself is afraid to then move close to the dog to retrieve the rolled towel for fear of retaliation by the dog. However, he does not advise the workshop attendees, or the people watching the video, of the likely risk to their safety should they use this method.

The punitive methods used by Mr. Gellman use force, fear, intimidation, and pain, and are psychologically damaging to dogs. They are abusive and inhumane. They also carry a high fallout rate, potentially increasing [aggressive behaviour, anxiety and fearfulness](#). They are physically damaging, can [cause undue stress and pain](#) to the animal and can encourage owners to actively pursue an increasingly violent and punitive approach when training their dog. These methods are [not humane](#), and they pose a major welfare concern.

Furthermore, Mr. Gellman’s approach is inconsistent with the Animal Welfare Act 1999 and the NZ Code of Welfare – Dogs, in particular

Minimum Standard 19 – Aids for Behavioural Modification (a)

Training aids,, must not be used in a way that causes unreasonable or unnecessary pain or distress to the dog.

Minimum Standard 18 – Training – Recommended Best Practice (h)

The owner’s dominant position should be enforced calmly and patiently using recognised techniques that provide positive reinforcement for acceptable

behaviour as part of the training process. Dominance should not be established by physical punishment or processes that are psychologically harmful to the dog.

The APDTNZ strongly discourages the public's attendance of Mr. Gellman's workshop. There are many qualified, educated, and professional trainers, behaviour consultants, and veterinary behaviourists throughout New Zealand that can help guide owners and dogs using humane methods of training and behaviour modification to address the most severe behaviour issues.

Follow [this link to locate an APDTNZ trainer](#) that is committed to following our Code of Ethics that promotes force free training.

Email: president@apdtnz.org.nz

Website: www.apdtnz.org.nz

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/APDTNZ/>