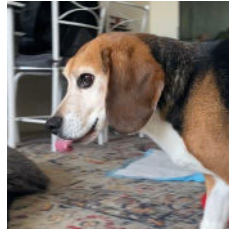


## **Behaviour Tips: *My fearful dog wants to leave the property. Is an invisible electric fence a good idea?***

**Recognizing signs of fear in your dog.** Dogs are extremely expressive and watching their body language can tell you a lot about how they are feeling. Initially, a fearful dog will often bring their ears down vertically and avert their gaze from the perceived threat. A number of signs of fear are exhibited in canine patients and can include:

- Avoidance
- Trembling/shaking
- Licking lips
- Drooling
- Yawning
- Pacing
- Destruction
- Escape behaviours



Some dogs may exhibit these behaviours in a progressive fashion and others may immediately resort to escape.

**Why is my dog afraid and trying to escape?** Dogs may develop fears as a result of previous experiences or exhibit fearful behaviour toward something new and unfamiliar. Some common reasons your dog may exhibit fearful escape behaviours include:

- Separation anxiety
- Noise phobia/fear/reactivity
- Panic

**I want to use an electric fence to prevent my dog from escaping.** Having your dog escape the yard is undoubtedly something you want to avoid. In the event the addition of a physical fence is impractical, you may have considered using electric fencing to prevent your dog from escaping the yard. You may also have considered it as a means to minimize the risk of your dog being hit by a car, prevent roaming or reduce exposure to diseases or other animals.

Not all dogs who want to escape are afraid – some are just curious, active and want to explore. The risks for them are the same as those for fearful dogs and may be greater, since they are bold enough to go on an adventure.

**How does an electric fence work?** A fencing wire is laid beneath the ground or wireless receivers are placed at the perimeter of the property. A battery/transmitter sends a radio signal along the fence wire or between the receivers which is picked up by a collar that your dog will wear. The collar emits a warning sound or shock when the pet approaches the invisible boundary. The electrical shock/pulse, can range in intensity from less than a small buzz to a very painful jolt. The premise is that there is a signal delivered to the animal to serve as a correction to startle the dog to ensure they stay within the boundaries of the fence.

The training method imposed by the electric fence is called *positive punishment*. This is where a negative stimulus is administered to reduce the occurrence of a behaviour. This

training technique has been found to be counterproductive in terms of learning. The pet is not being taught what the correct behaviour is and subsequently, the pulse/shock/noise from the collar can result in fear or redirected aggressive behaviour towards yourself or others.

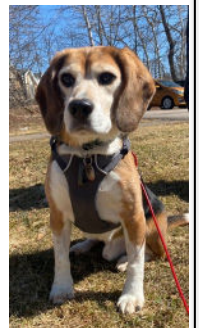
**Is electric fencing a good solution for my dogs' escape behaviours?** Electric fencing is not a good method to reduce escape behaviours *especially* in an anxious or fearful dog. Fearful dogs exhibiting escape behaviours are already in a heightened emotional state, introducing a negative stimulus to these dogs will likely potentiate these emotions and can result in generalized anxiety or aggression as they become increasingly afraid.

Without teaching the dog what the appropriate alternative behaviour is, escape behaviour is likely to persist, and may even intensify as they attempt to flee from the stimulus administered by the collar. Some dogs will leave the premises despite the shock administered, and will be shocked again on re-entry to the property, creating further confusion in terms of what is expected of them. The dog may begin to live in a constant state of fear/anxiety of being shocked as they do not understand the connection between the behaviour and the punishment.

The electric fence may also not meet your other goals such as exposure to other animals or disease. Any animal not wearing a receiver collar is not affected by the fencing and is free to enter and leave the property at will. This can result not only in exposure to wildlife/other animals but can also make your dog feel trapped in the yard with the intruder as they are unable to remove themselves from the situation while the fence is on. This feeling of being trapped can lead to aggression toward the wildlife or other animals as the dog attempts to defend its space from unwanted visitors.

### **Better alternatives to electric fencing:**

- Leash training
- Exercise, attention and cognitive and physical activity
- Physical fences/ spacious enclosures
- Train barriers/limitations
- Place high value toys/treats/activities (eg, a wading pool) in desired/designated areas
- When all else fails, invisible electric fences should be used only under guidance/instruction by your veterinary team with a smaller, internal real fence.



*Although these tips are helpful, please discuss any behavioural/medical concerns with your local veterinarian. For all cases where you still have concerns, seek specialist services ([www.dacvb.org](http://www.dacvb.org)). At AVC you can contact the AVC Behavioural Medicine Service ([AVCBehaviouralMed@upe.ca](mailto:AVCBehaviouralMed@upe.ca)).*