Shock Collar Settings Explained: Beep, Vibrate, Stim

A free guide from PetsTEK — shockcollarfordogs.com

Three modes, one order, and a level scale that means nothing outside your own collar's manual. This guide explains what beep, vibrate, and stim actually do, how to find your dog's working level, and the settings details that trip people up — Boost, tone-hold, and why a "level 30" on one collar is not a "level 30" on another.

This guide assumes your dog already knows basic commands ("come," "sit") on-leash. If not, teach those first — the collar reinforces known commands, it doesn't teach new ones. Never use a training collar on a puppy under 6 months, or on a fearful or aggressive dog without a professional trainer.

The Three Modes

Most remote training collars have the same three modes, used in this order:

1. Beep (Tone)

A short audible tone. Dogs learn to associate the beep with a command — often "come" — and most training quickly shifts to beep-only for dogs that respond to it. Beep is always your first prompt. Condition it first (beep → treat, many reps) so the dog perks up happily at the sound before you ever use it in training.

Watch out: on E-Collar Technologies stopwatch-style remotes, holding the tone button for more than 1.2 seconds rolls into continuous stim. Tap tone; don't hold it unless you intend to stimulate.

2. Vibrate

A buzz the dog feels but doesn't hear. Useful for deaf dogs, or as a step up when the beep alone isn't enough. Vibration is non-stimulating — it gets the dog's attention without any electrical pulse. Many dogs, especially small dogs, never need anything stronger than vibrate. Some collars let you adjust vibration strength; others have a single fixed vibration level.

The no-stim option: the E-Collar Technologies PG-300 ("Pager Only") is vibration + tone only — no stim at all, and no contact points. It exists for sensitive, skittish, or hearing-impaired dogs, and for owners who want a vibration-only tool.

3. Stim

A brief, adjustable electrical pulse. You find your dog's "working level" — the lowest level they notice — and train at or just above it. The working level is usually

surprisingly low, and you never need to crank it.

Stim comes in two forms:

- **Momentary (Nick):** a single brief pulse. One tap, one pulse.
- **Continuous (Constant):** stimulation while the button is held — up to the collar's auto-stop. Use brief taps, not long holds.

Built-in guardrail: every major brand caps a continuous press. Dogtra collars auto-stop after 12 seconds; E-Collar Technologies continuous stim times out after 10 seconds; the SportDOG YardTrainer times out after 10 seconds; the PetSafe SMART DOG stops after 10 seconds. A stuck button can't keep stimulating. Never hold the stim button down on purpose — short taps are the whole technique.

Finding the Working Level (Step by Step)

The working level is the lowest stim level your dog notices. Finding it takes two minutes. This is the clearest procedure in the manuals:

1. **Start at level 1**, with the dog standing calmly in a quiet place.
2. **Press the stim button for 1–2 seconds.** Watch for the subtlest reaction — an ear flick, a head turn, a neck twitch, a brief pause.
3. **No reaction?** Go up one level and repeat.
4. **The first level that gets a mild, curious reaction is the working level.** Train at or just above it.
5. **If the dog yelps, jumps, or panics**, the level is far too high. Drop back down, go back to beep-only, and start over lower.

Recheck every session. The working level varies by dog, by day, and by distraction level. A level that works in the quiet yard will usually need to go up slightly in a distracting environment. Don't assume yesterday's level is today's.

Timing matters more than level. Stim must come the instant the dog ignores a command — within 1–2 seconds. Later than that, the dog can't connect the two. Bad timing confuses the dog no matter how correct the level is.

Level Scales Are NOT Comparable Across Brands

This is the most common settings mistake. A "level 30" on one collar is not the same as a "level 30" on another — the scales are relative within each model only. Never compare levels across brands or models.

Collar / brand	Level scale
Dogtra X-Series, 200NCPT	0–100
Dogtra 3500X	1–8
Older / general Dogtra models	0–127
E-Collar Technologies (ET-300, ME-300, etc.)	0/1–100, plus Boost 1–60

Collar / brand	Level scale
SportDOG FieldTrainer 425X	21 levels
SportDOG SportTrainer 1275	3 ranges × 10 levels
SportDOG YardTrainer YT-100	8 levels
PetSafe remote trainers	15 levels

Two practical consequences:

- **Don't take level advice from someone with a different collar.** "I use level 40" is meaningless unless you have the same model.
- **Start at the bottom of your own collar's scale every time**, and work up to the first mild reaction. The scale is just a dial; your dog's reaction is the measurement.

Boost: Additive, Not a Separate Scale

Boost is one of the most misunderstood settings. Boost is **additive**: the delivered level is your set level **plus** the boost amount.

- On E-Collar Technologies and Dogtra X-Series collars, Boost is adjustable from 1–60 with a **default of 5**. So if your working level is 15 and Boost is at its default of 5, a boosted press delivers 20.
- Boost is meant for high-distraction moments — a dog about to bolt after a squirrel — not as your everyday level. Set it, leave it, and use it sparingly.
- **Not every brand does Boost the same way.** On the SportDOG SportTrainer 1275, Boost delivers stim 2 levels above your current level, capped so it never goes above Level 10. Check your own collar's manual for how its Boost behaves.

Guardrails Worth Knowing

- **Level lock.** Most collars have a way to lock the level so it can't change by accident — Dogtra's Level Lock, E-Collar Technologies' Lock-and-Set dial lock. Use it once you've found the working level.
- **PetSafe's level lock.** The PetSafe 100 Yard Remote Trainer ships with levels 8–15 pre-locked; levels 1–7 cover most training. The lock is a reminder that stim is getting high.
- **Auto-stop.** As above: 10–12 seconds of continuous press, then the collar stops on its own. Never lean on this — use short taps.
- **Tone-hold warning.** On E-Collar Technologies stopwatch remotes, holding tone for more than 1.2 seconds rolls into continuous stim. If you only wanted a beep, tap and release.

When to Use Which Mode

Situation	Mode
Prompting a known command	Beep first, always
Beep isn't enough	Vibrate
Deaf dog, or dog that startles at sound	Vibrate (or a vibration-only collar like the PG-300)
Dog ignores beep + vibrate for a known command	One brief stim tap at the working level, then reward the correct response
High-distraction moment, dog about to bolt	Boosted stim, sparingly — not your everyday level
Dog doesn't know the command yet	No mode — go back and teach the command on-leash first
Dog is fearful, aggressive, or shutting down	No mode — stop, and get a professional trainer

Rules that never change: basics first. Beep first. Lowest working level. Timing within 1–2 seconds. Never punish. Never raise the level in frustration. If the dog yelps, freezes, cowers, or runs from you, stop — the level is too high or the dog isn't ready.

Quick Reference Card

Setting	What it means
Beep (tone)	Audible prompt — always first
Vibrate	Felt buzz, no stim — second step
Stim — Momentary (Nick)	One brief pulse
Stim — Continuous (Constant)	While held, auto-stops at 10–12 sec
Working level	Lowest level the dog notices (ear flick, head turn, pause)
Boost	Additive: set level + boost (default 5 on E-Collar Tech / Dogtra X-Series)
Tone-hold >1.2 sec (E-Collar Tech)	Rolls into continuous stim — tap, don't hold
Level scales	Relative per model only — never compare across brands

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By PetsTEK — shockcollarfordogs.com. This guide is free to share. For the full reference, see "Shock Collar for Dogs: The Complete Guide" on shockcollarfordogs.com. Shop training collars at petstek.com.