

# Muzzles

There are many reasons a dog may need to wear a muzzle. For example, visits to the vet, meeting new dogs or people or when off lead around wildlife. Muzzles keep your dog and you safe and allow your dog to enjoy life without risk.

Every dog can be taught to tolerate or even enjoy wearing a muzzle and it is a



good idea to teach your dog to wear a muzzle comfortably, even if only as a precaution. When in pain dogs can display uncharacteristic aggression and in an unexpected emergency a dog which can comfortably wear a muzzle can be given treatment much more easily and safely.

There are many types of muzzle available to buy, the best type is a 'baskerville', similar to the design pictured here. It has an open basket which allows the dog to pant and drink, and also allows tasty rewards to be pushed through.

The first step in getting your dog used to the muzzle is to put some of their favourite food at the end. Your dog will then push their nose right in to get the reward. This starts to set up an association between the muzzle and a tasty reward.

Remember to use only the tastiest of treats in muzzle training – you are trying to make your dog love the muzzle. For most dogs cream cheese, peanut butter, bits of chicken or other meat are far more effective than dry dog biscuits. Find something your dog loves and your training will progress much more quickly!

Once your dog is happy with their nose inside the muzzle, build up slowly to fastening the muzzle behind its head. The first step is to lightly tickle your dog's ears as they eat to get them used to the sensation of something behind their head where the strap will be clipped up. Then start to move the straps softly, building up to holding the straps behind your dog's head, all while they eat tasty food from the muzzle.

Once your dog is comfortable with you doing this you can move to clipping and unclipping the muzzle. At first make this very quick, while the dog is eating the tasty food you put in the muzzle, then start to gradually extend the time you leave the muzzle on.

## Advice Sheet

It is important that your dog doesn't believe your muzzle training game gets harder and harder each time, so vary the times as you progress and throw in lots of short periods which are easy for your dog to complete.



Once you can clip the muzzle up for a couple of seconds you can start to add treats through the muzzle to help your dog learn that keeping the muzzle on is rewarding. Once your dog understands this you can start to ask for behaviours such as sit, down, give paw, (anything easy for your dog to do) and reward your dog each time they get it right. If your

dog refuses to perform a command they know well otherwise you may need to take a step back in your muzzle training.

Some dogs don't like to walk wearing a muzzle at first. To get your dog used to moving in a muzzle make sure you ask for a fun recall as your dog is getting used to it. Start by just taking one step back and asking your dog to come to you, be very excited as if this is a great game for you, reward your dog and take the muzzle off. Then as you start to extend the distances your dog will cover to reach you, you are also building up the time your dog is wearing the muzzle!

Once your dog has made good progress in accepting the muzzle, start to vary the places you do your muzzle training. Aim for both inside and outside so that your dog gets used to the muzzle in different environments. You may need to do very short walks, round the garden, or just a few minutes, as your dog gets used to the muzzle. It can be difficult to get a dog to focus when they are excited to go for a walk so don't necessarily expect your dog to accept the muzzle at first when you are getting ready for a walk. It can help to put the muzzle on for the last few minutes of a walk and work backwards, or to put the muzzle on before getting the lead out to go for a walk. Not every dog learns in the same way, so find what works best for your dog!

Some times your dog will try to paw off the muzzle during your training progress. It is important that you don't immediately take the muzzle off – your dog will quickly make the connection that to get the muzzle off they paw at it. Try distracting them and asking for a command they know before taking it off. Even better encourage your dog to move forward a few steps. Once all four paws are on the floor again, take the muzzle off. You may have pushed your dog too quickly - take a step back in the training and build back up.

If you encounter problems muzzle training your dog, please contact me for more advice and an individual training plan for your dog.

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