

TRAINING A DOG TO WEAR A MUZZLE

There are many reasons why a dog may need to wear a muzzle, such as safety during veterinary procedures, grooming, or in cities where some breeds may be required by law to wear a muzzle in public spaces. However, if a dog has never learned to comfortably wear one, he may find it very stressful. He may try to avoid it, snap at it, refuse to walk while wearing it, or paw and scratch at it, potentially injuring himself. You can help your dog learn that wearing a muzzle can be an enjoyable experience, though. Through positive training and counter-conditioning, you can teach your dog to willingly accept and comfortably wear a muzzle. The goal is for your dog to learn that when wearing the muzzle good things happen, such as tasty treats or going out for a walk!

GENERAL TIPS:

- When getting started, choose a location where your dog is comfortable and without too many distractions. You will also need lots of tasty treats that your dog loves!
- Go slow! Break the training down into small steps to keep your dog comfortable and interested.
- Keep training sessions short and enjoyable. Approach it as a fun learning game for your dog.
- If at any time during the training your dog tries to avoid or resist the muzzle, back up a step to where your dog is comfortable and proceed at a slower pace.

STEP #1:

- Hold the muzzle in one hand with the opening facing the dog and the straps held out of the way. Start with the muzzle behind your back or at your side with your dog in front of you.
- Show the muzzle to your dog but do not move it toward his face. When your dog looks at the muzzle use a clicker or marker word (such as "nice!") and reward your dog with a treat from your other hand. Move the muzzle back to your side or behind your back as you give the reward. Repeat this process several times.
- Some dogs will be curious of the muzzle and will quickly move towards it to investigate it. Others might be more wary at first, but as they begin to associate the sight of the muzzle with treats, they will become more comfortable.
- As your dog begins to show more interest in the muzzle, you can move it slightly closer to your dog to encourage him to interact with it, such as sniffing or touching the muzzle with his nose. Mark (say 'nice!' or click) and reward these positive interactions to the muzzle with lots of treats and praise.



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STEP #2

- Once your dog is touching the muzzle with his nose each time it is presented, you can encourage him to put his nose inside the muzzle by placing a little bit of something tasty, such as peanut butter or cheese, inside the lip of the muzzle, or you can hold a treat just inside the opening.
- Mark and reward for placing his nose inside the muzzle.
- Do not push the muzzle forward on to the dog's face. Your goal is for your dog to place his own nose inside the muzzle when it is presented.
- You can encourage your dog to place his nose further into the muzzle by gradually moving a treat deeper into the opening.
- After your dog is reliably placing his face inside the muzzle you can move on to the next step: building duration.



STEP #3

- In order to eventually be able to fasten the straps you will need your dog to hold his face inside the muzzle for several seconds.
- Build duration by waiting just a fraction of a second longer before marking and treating. Alternatively, you can feed a few treats through the muzzle. Build duration slowly and keep it fun!
- Once your dog will hold his face in the muzzle for several seconds you can then start manipulating the straps. Practice moving the straps around the dog's head and then mark and treat. Do not buckle them at first. It's important to make sure ahead of time that your dog is okay with the sound of the buckle being fastened.
- Let your dog get comfortable with holding his face in the muzzle while you move the straps. After your dog is comfortably keeping the muzzle on his face while you manipulate the straps you can fasten the buckle, mark and reward, and then unfasten the buckle. When your dog is comfortable with this step you can start gradually increasing the length of time you leave the muzzle on, rewarding frequently.



Once you have taught your dog to willingly wear a muzzle, do not only resort to using the muzzle during stressful events. Periodically continue to use the muzzle during positive situations, such as walks or training games, in order to keep the muzzle an overall positive and enjoyable experience for your dog. With a little patience and a lot of practice you can teach your dog to love wearing a muzzle!

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