

Muzzle training

It is sensible to teach all dogs to feel comfortable and relaxed wearing a muzzle. Some situations in which a dog may need to wear a muzzle are:

- ┌ In painful situations such as after an accident or injury when handling is necessary to get your dog the veterinary care he needs
- ┌ In dogs that are fearful of other dogs or unfamiliar people to keep everyone safe whilst desensitisation training is under way
- ┌ In dogs that have tendencies to scavenge food that may disagree with them or that eat inedible objects (e.g. stones)
- ┌ In dogs that have tendencies to chase and injure wildlife (most sighthounds are muzzled if they are to be allowed to exercise off lead)
- ┌ Certain breeds of dog (including Staffordshire Bull Terriers) are required by law to be muzzled at all times when out in public in some countries, including France.
- ┌ Dogs that have a tendency to nip when overexcited during play with other dogs
- ┌ Dogs that are fearful and liable to bite if members of the public attempt to stroke them

With gentle, careful training your dog can associate the muzzle with good things, and learn to wear it calmly. However, this will not be possible if you wait for an emergency to occur and then have to force the muzzle onto your dog when he is already distressed.

Which muzzle?

A basket muzzle is the most appropriate choice as it allows dogs to pant and drink whilst wearing it. Cloth muzzles are only appropriate for very brief periods, for example whilst an injection is administered, as they do not allow these normal behaviours to occur and can be dangerous.



A basket muzzle

Of the basket muzzles there are several brands and shapes to choose from. The Baskerville muzzles are usually light brown in colour and are produced in a variety of sizes in the traditional shape and a shorter shape for short-faced dogs. Baskerville Ultra muzzles are produced in black or light blue versions and are designed for longer periods of wear – they have additional straps for increased security, included one that attaches to the dog's usual collar and are softer and more rounded than the traditional Baskerville muzzles. Greyhound muzzles are available in a variety of bright colours at www.greyhoundmegastore.com which probably doesn't make much difference to your dog but if having a muzzle to match your colour and lead makes you feel happier about your dog wearing it, this can only be a good thing!

The muzzle must be correctly fitted to ensure that it is effective and comfortable. A nurse appointment can be made to help you with selecting and fitting a muzzle for your dog.

Muzzle training

Begin when your dog is calm and relaxed. Accepting a muzzle for the first time can be difficult for your dog so use high value treats (pieces of sausage, cheese, mackerel) and save them for this training only so that your dog is motivated to participate in your training. It can also be helpful to have some squeezable cheese spread or flat treats such as Schmackos for the later stages of training as these can easily be fed through the muzzle.



There is an excellent video describing this process at www.lifeskillsforpuppies.co.uk/muzzlevideo.

1. Hide the muzzle behind your back. Show it to your dog and immediately give him a treat. Take the muzzle away again. Repeat several times so that he associates the arrival of the muzzle with a treat and is actively looking for the muzzle to appear.
2. When your dog is confidently looking for the muzzle, place the treat inside the muzzle (near the straps – you will need to keep the muzzle flat and your hand beneath it to stop the treat falling out) and let your dog eat it from there.
3. Always remove the muzzle gently whilst he is still eating so that he is not practising backing out of it.
4. When he is happily taking the treats from the muzzle, have him take them from the nose part of the muzzle (so he has to put his nose right in). Again, remove the muzzle whilst he is still eating.
5. The next step is to offer the empty muzzle and when he puts his nose in, immediately feed a treat through the end (the squeezable cheese or thin, flat Schmackos are easiest to get through).
6. Progress to offering treats through the end of the muzzle, waiting a second or two and then offering more treats to teach your dog to keep his nose in the muzzle for a longer period of time.
7. The next step is to gently hold the straps together behind the head in between pushing treats through the muzzle.
8. When this is secure, you can practise clipping and unclipping the muzzle.
9. Keep the muzzle on for longer periods of time, with treats given intermittently to reinforce good behaviour.

REMEMBER: Do this gradually - up to 5 minutes a day is recommended and it will take several weeks to progress to leaving the muzzle on for several minutes. Always make the sessions fun and positive – never force the dog to wear the muzzle or punish or scold him. Try to read his body language and do not move on a step until he seems completely relaxed about the previous one. However, if he

wiggles or tries to push the muzzle off with his paws try to distract him with treats through the end of the muzzle and only remove it when he has stopped trying to get it off.