



APBC

ASSOCIATION OF PET
BEHAVIOUR COUNSELLORS

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ADVICE SHEET 8

Preparing Your Dog For Wearing a Muzzle/Head-Collar

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Introduction

Dogs do not always appreciate it when we ask them to wear equipment such as a muzzle or head-collar on their face. It can feel uncomfortable and distracting - much like when we first put a collar and leash on a puppy they can struggle and become distressed. It is important that our dog is not anxious or stressed by wearing a muzzle/head-collar, and far easier to walk them safely if they are happy to accept it.

The following steps assume that you have taught your dog a marker word or use a clicker. If you haven't then you can still use the instructions by praising and giving a treat after each step, but markers do make the process much quicker (you may like to read advice sheet 10 for more details). Make sure you have a supply of small soft treats such as pieces of cheese nearby, and your clicker or a well-known marker word (e.g. Yes or X).

We are going to teach your dog two important things:

1. That muzzles and/or head-collars are fun things and good stuff happens around them
2. That it feels nice to have things on and around your face.

Keep sessions to a maximum of 5 minutes each, although you can include several sessions per day. Make sure your dog is completely happy with each step before you move on, and feel free to move between the stages as needed. In all cases you are aiming to stop the session while your dog is still engaged and excited, and definitely before they make any attempt to paw at their face.

Suggested steps to follow (expect to take around 3-4 days in total)

1. Place the head-collar or muzzle on the floor near to your dog where they can see it - as soon as your dog shows any interest in the equipment Mark and Reward. Repeat this several times as needed until your dog is showing some interest in the equipment. If necessary you can place a piece of food beside or on top of the equipment to get the dog started but only do this once or twice.
2. Hold the muzzle or head-collar in your hand and offer it in front of the dog - do not try to put it on their nose yet. Mark and Reward when the dog shows interest in the equipment even if they are not yet touching it with their nose. Repeat this exercise until your dog is confidently touching their nose to the muzzle or head-collar.



the following procedure** Using a piece of light elastic (available cheaply from any sewing or handicraft shop) as a loose loop to place on the dog's nose - Mark and Reward if you can place the loop on their nose, Increase the amount of time the dog is happy to have the elastic on their nose.



4. Holding the muzzle or head-collar out to your dog, wait until the dog voluntarily places their nose into the equipment - Mark and Reward. Repeat this step until your dog is confidently thrusting their nose into the equipment.

We are now going to work on the dog being happy having their nose in the muzzle for more than a few seconds. The sequence is muzzle on nose - mark - reward via muzzle - remove muzzle and repeat sequence.

3. ** If your dog is very unsure about having anything on their face, use