



Muzzle Training

Within this handout are tips to help your dog become more accustomed and comfortable with wearing a muzzle. Sometimes, muzzles need to be worn by dogs because they are painful or frightened and may therefore attempt to bite as a sign of this.

STRESS RELIEF

- This is particularly important for dogs that already have a negative association with the muzzle. By spraying a calming spray such as Adaptil or Pet Remedy on your dog (not the face!) about an 30mins – 1 hour before commencing training, should help to ease the stress that they associate with the muzzle.
- We can also reduce the stress by doing the muzzle training in a room/environment that they are usually relaxed in (e.g. living room) and do not associate 'bad' things happening (e.g. vet consult room!)
- Reinforcement. Dogs like to work for rewards – the best kind of reward for muzzle training are small pieces of either their favourite food (e.g. chicken), or low fat treats (such as Pet Munchies Training Treats) that can be given whilst the dog is wearing the muzzle.
- Ensure that each step is followed in order to help reduce stress. Keeping an eye out for signs of stress (please see 'signs of stress' handout) is really important as if training is continued, can make the muzzle a bad experience. If any signs of stress are noted, go back to the previous step.

POSITIVE ASSOCIATION

Firstly, we need to make our dogs realise that a) muzzles are not scary, and b) placing a muzzle doesn't mean scary things are going to happen. To do this, we can carry out the following:

- Place the muzzle on the floor of a room your dog is comfortable in, before the dog enters the room. After the dog has entered the room, if they approach the muzzle (either by getting within a metre of the muzzle or by sniffing etc), give your dog a treat. It is really important to reward your dog **whilst they are in the vicinity of the muzzle**, otherwise, we are rewarding them for walking away from it!
- Repeat step one, but this time place treats on the muzzle and closer to the muzzle for your dog to collect.
- Once your dog is comfortable with approaching the muzzle, hold the muzzle in one hand, close to your body. Treat your dog upon approaching the muzzle in your hand and coming close to you. You could also add a sit command after the dog has approached to get them to stay near you and the muzzle. Make sure you reward for this too!
- Once your dog is comfortable with staying near you whilst you are holding the muzzle, try extending the muzzle towards your dog. Start with extending only slightly, making sure to treat if the dog shows no sign of stress. Each time, get closer to your dog, ensuring to reward each time.
- Next, place a few treats inside the muzzle whilst you are holding it, so your dog has to put their nose in the muzzle to collect the treats. You could also try holding the treats at one end of the muzzle for your dog to collect through the muzzle. You can then control the amount of time your dog has to keep their nose inside the muzzle to get the treats. Ensure to increase the time gradually so that your dog is not put off. Squeezy cheese is also good to use for this!
- Once your dog has mastered the previous step for a decent amount of time, you can then try fastening the muzzle, ensure to still reward the placing the muzzle on stage, and also after fastening the muzzle. Some dogs do not like the sound of the muzzle fastening behind their ears, so it is important to either keep them distracted with treats through the muzzle and/or reward after the fastening of the muzzle. Again, increase the time that the muzzle is fastened for gradually, keeping an eye out for any signs of stress.
- Eventually, your dog should associate seeing the muzzle and wearing the muzzle to getting a treat, and almost seeing the muzzle as a 'game'. Once your dog is comfortable with the muzzle, then the muzzle can be used in situations where your dog is not overly comfortable.