



Maplewood Dog Training

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Teaching Your Dog to Happily Wear a Muzzle (or Gentle Leader)

By Katrin Andberg

While muzzling dogs is not something that we like to think about, being comfortable tolerating wearing a muzzle is an important skill for any dog. Stressful vet visits or injury are common times when you dog may need to be muzzled for his safety and for the safety of others. For dogs with aggression problems, being able to tolerate wearing a muzzle, or Gentle Leader, can often times be a life or death matter. A muzzle increases safety for you, your family, other people and animals when your dog has an aggression problem. Teaching your dog to happily tolerate wearing a muzzle is critical for decreasing your dog's stress and anxiety in already very stressful situations and increasing the likelihood that the behavior modification protocols will be successful.

The day outlines below are **minimum guidelines**. It is recommended that when teaching your dog to tolerate the muzzle, you do each step for the length of time it takes for your dog to be completely relaxed and happy about that step. Use the recommended day outlines as a minimum length of time you should do each step, do not do each step for less than the recommended outline length of time, but please do be encouraged to work each step longer if your dog needs it. **When you practice each day:**

- Do short sessions of 10 high value treats each.
- 3 sessions per day is the bare minimum, the more you can do the better.
- Use treats that your dog rates a 10 out of 10, treats that he says, "Oh, WOW, my Favorite!!"
- It should take you, at minimum, 12 days to get to the beginnings of Step 4, and, on average, 3 weeks to get your dog fully comfortable wearing the muzzle for 30 minutes or more at a time.

Stress signs from your dog that indicate you need to work on a step longer are: turning head, licking lips, yawning, or sniffing the ground when you take out the muzzle. Getting up and walking away, avoiding the muzzle completely is another big stress signal. Others are your dog freezing in place, closing his mouth and not panting, furrowing his brow or pinning his ears back against his head. Any of these stress signs indicate that you need to **slow down** and take longer on that step or even go back to the previous step. **In the end we want a dog that, when you take the muzzle out, jumps for joy saying, "Yes! Let's put that on!!!"**

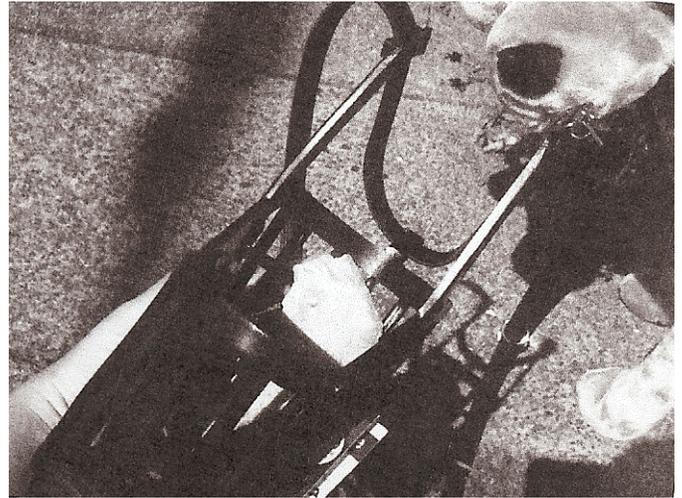
Step 1: (3 days) - The Muzzle is Good!

1. Have your dog sit
2. Take out muzzle and hold it in your hand
3. Give your dog a treat
4. Repeat for 10 treats

Ready to move on to Step 2 when: Your dog happily gets excited when he sees you take out the muzzle

Step 2: (4-5 days) - Put Your Nose In

1. Put a treat in the inside edge of the muzzle (see photo)
2. Hold treat primed muzzle out to your dog
3. Let your dog eat the treat out of the muzzle
4. As your dog improves & enthusiastically puts his nose in the muzzle, over a period of days, move the treat further & further inside the muzzle until your dog is happily putting his entire nose in the muzzle
5. Once your dog is putting his entire nose in the muzzle on his own, feed him a 2nd treat through the side bars of the muzzle
6. Repeat for 10 treats



Ready to move on to Step 3 when: Your dog excitedly & enthusiastically shoves his nose into the muzzle when you hold it out to him

Step 3: (4+ days) - Buckle It

1. Put treat in the inside of the muzzle
2. Hold treat primed muzzle out to your dog & let him put his nose into it
3. While his nose is in it, buckle the muzzle loosely around the back of his neck
4. Feed your dog a treat through the side bars of the muzzle
5. Remove muzzle immediately after feeding the treat through the bars
6. Repeat for 10 treats

Ready to move on to Step 4 when: Your dog excitedly & enthusiastically shoves his nose into the muzzle when you hold it out to him & lets you buckle it behind his ears

Step 4: (5+ days) - Wear It

1. Follow steps 1-4 of Step 3
2. Feed your dog through the side bars of the muzzle 1 treat every 1 second for 5 seconds
3. Remove muzzle
4. Once your dog calmly accepts wearing the muzzle for 5 seconds, increase to 10 seconds, then 15 seconds, etc. in 5-10 second increments over a period of days, until your dog calmly & happily wears the muzzle for 30 minutes or longer.

Remember to watch your dog for both subtle and overt signs of stress at each step. It's better to take your time, go slow and really make an effort to teach your dog that the muzzle is a good thing to wear, than rush through the steps and end up with a dog who thinks wearing the muzzle is punishment. The muzzle is not punishment, it's a safety tool that enables everyone involved in your dog's life and the behavior modification protocols to be able to help your dog in the safest ways possible.