

Muzzle Training

If your dog is fearful, anxious, or aggressive or can become this way in any situation you should train your dog to wear a muzzle. Muzzles are a harmless way to help your dog and other members of the community – both 2 legged and 4 legged – safe. A dog that is afraid is more likely to bite even if the dog has never bitten before. If your dog bites a person or another animal you can be held liable for any and all damages. If your dog is wearing a muzzle, you have the peace of mind that if the dog is able to cause any damage through a muzzle it will be the most minimal possible.

Types of Muzzles

There are different types of muzzles available so choose the one that fits your situation best. Basket style muzzles, like the Baskerville Ultra Muzzle are best for dogs that are wearing the muzzle for longer periods of time. When wearing most basket muzzles, dogs are able to pant normally, drink water, and some they can eat food through. Nylon or mesh muzzles common to most of the ones used in veterinarian's offices and grooming salons are limited to up to 20 minutes of use without a veterinarian's direct observation because of how the muzzle reduces the dog's ability to pant normally which can cause overheating.

The muzzle that you will use in this training plan must allow for the dog to receive food as a reward, and to be able to chew the food.

Training Process

This training will be done using a "mark" followed by a reward. A mark can be the click of a clicker, or you can use some other clear, concise word (such as "YES!" or "GOOD!") to mark each behavior. You will need to be able to say the marker word in a short, one breath, one syllable phrase. If you are unable to produce a mark using a word in this manner then use a clicker to "mark." Do each step no longer than 3 seconds. If the dog does not present an acceptable behavior within the 3 seconds to receive a mark, reward, place the muzzle behind your back and repeat the previous step 5 more times.

You can begin desensitizing the muzzle by putting the muzzle on the ground somewhere near where the dog eats. You can also put food inside of the muzzle (with the muzzle propped up on it's end so the dog can easily put its nose inside) if your dog is willing to eat it and allow your dog to freely take food out of the muzzle. If you are doing this you must provide the dog with enough of a high value treat that the dog will not shy away from the muzzle. Be sure you are confident your dog will not avoid the muzzle during this first presentation. If you are not sure if the dog will eat out of the muzzle then start with the following steps.

You never want your dog to get the experience of backing out of the muzzle. With this training you should be able to train your dog that each time the muzzle is presented they will shove their nose happily inside of it. The dog will inform you when they are ready to progress to the next step. Allow your dog to set the pace of the training by marking and rewarding at the current step. When the dog presents the behavior in the next step then begin intermittent reinforcement*** of the previous step and continuous (1 for 1) reinforcement** for the current step.

Start with muzzle behind your back and treats in a treat pouch or on a counter top outside of the dog's range to steal them. Remove the muzzle each time your mark before you give a reward.

1. Present muzzle, dogs looks at muzzle, mark, reward
2. Present muzzle, dog touches muzzle with nose, mark, reward
3. Present muzzle, dog puts nose in muzzle, mark, reward
4. Present muzzle, wait for dog to put nose in muzzle (ignoring all other behaviors), mark, reward

Repeat previous steps, starting from step 1, but after you mark, feed the dog through the muzzle. Remove the muzzle for the next step after the dog has received the reward for the previous successful trial. For these next steps buckle the strap that goes behind the ears. At this point it doesn't matter if it is fitted to the dog because we are not ready for the dog to actually wear the muzzle. Both hands will need to be behind your back for this exercise (must use treat pouch).

1. Present the muzzle with one hand holding the portion where the nose goes and the other hand holding the head strap up (so that the dog can have the neck strap being placed over its head in subsequent steps), dog touches muzzle, mark, reward
2. Present muzzle using both hands (one hand holding the portion where the nose goes and the other hand holding the head strap up), dog puts nose in muzzle, mark, reward
3. Fit the muzzle to the dog by putting the muzzle onto the dog's head/nose and connecting the strap to fit behind the dog's ears, mark, reward, remove the muzzle

After you have determined the size of the muzzle, you will need to do several trials with the muzzle fitted a slight bit looser than the actual correct fit so that you can slip the strap over the dog's ears easily.

1. With the strap buckled, present the muzzle using both hands (one hand holding the portion where the nose goes and the other hand holding the head strap up), dog puts nose in muzzle, slip the buckled strap over the ears, mark, reward, remove the muzzle
2. With the strap buckled (and fitted to the correct size of the dog) present the muzzle using both hands (one hand holding the portion where the nose goes and the other hand holding the head strap up), dog puts nose in muzzle, slip the buckled strap over the ears, mark, reward, wait for the dog to finish the reward, remove the muzzle

In the following steps you will start with the buckle strap unbuckled so that you can actually put the muzzle on the dog and buckle it. Present the muzzle, dog puts nose in muzzle, place straps behind dogs ears and buckle, mark, reward. When your dog is ready to begin generalizing the use of the muzzle in different contexts you will ask your dog to do simple behaviors while he is wearing the muzzle. You should be rewarding each cued behavior on a continuous reward schedule so your dog still practices how to take treats through the muzzle.

1. While the dog is wearing the muzzle, practice obedience cues that the dog already knows (sit, down, shake, high five, hand target, walking in a heel) for less than 1 minute, remove the muzzle.
2. Repeat previous step rewarding each cued behavior on an intermittent reward schedule.
3. Repeat using an intermittent reward schedule for less than 3 minutes.
4. Repeat for less than 10 minutes.
5. Start back from the first step but ask for only 1-2 behaviors. Repeat each step asking for only 1-2 behaviors.

Practice in new locations. In each location you will start by offering the dog the muzzle, allowing the dog to put his nose in the muzzle, buckling the strap, mark, reward. Practice for less than 1 minute in each new location. Repeat for less than 3 minutes in each new location. Repeat for less than 10 minutes in each new location.

** Continuous Reinforcement - rewards are given every time the cued behavior is performed.

*** Intermittent Reinforcement - rewards are only given part of the time that the cued behavior is performed.



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