



Lake Stevens Animal Hospital

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Training Dogs to Love Wearing a Muzzle

regardless of how stellar your handling techniques and ability to calm anxious dogs are, at some point you'll need to muzzle some pets. Muzzling can greatly improve safety for staff; however some dogs become so stressed that they struggle more and may be more aggressive on future visits. This unwanted effect of muzzling can be avoided by training dogs to love their muzzle.



1.) Start with a hungry dog and tasty treats. It's generally best to use semi moist treats such as Natural Balance® food roll or Pup-peroni®. Alternatively, meat-flavored baby food or canned cheese or peanut butter spread thinly over a spoon works well.



2.) In this example we'll use peanut butter on a spoon. Start by extending your hand or the spoon with the treat through the muzzle far enough so that the dog will immediately go over and start licking the peanut butter rather than being worried that you're going to shove the muzzle on.



3.) First, hold the muzzle out of range but so that the dog can see the treat.



4.) Then present the muzzle with the peanut butter-covered spoon. Remember the goal is to put the treat far enough through the muzzle that the dog immediately walks up to eat. Let her lick the peanut butter for 5-10 seconds.



5.) Then, before she has a chance to finish the peanut butter and choose to pull her head away from the muzzle, you should pull the muzzle and peanut butter spoon away from her. Be sure to move the muzzle and spoon far enough away so she does not try to follow it forward. By removing both peanut butter and muzzle together, you'll help your dog understand two things; one, you are in control of the treat and muzzle and two, the treat and muzzle are associated.



6.) Once you're certain that the dog is comfortable with the previous steps, repeat the procedure but with the spoon held in the muzzle so she has to stick her nose slightly into the muzzle to get the treat.



7.) Again start with the muzzle and peanut butter spoon out of range. She should be looking at both expectantly.



8.) When you present the spoon and muzzle, be sure to hold both firmly in place so your dog doesn't push it away. Also be careful to avoid trying to slip the muzzle further over her nose. The goal is that she chooses to push her nose through rather than you shoving it on and causing her to pull away.



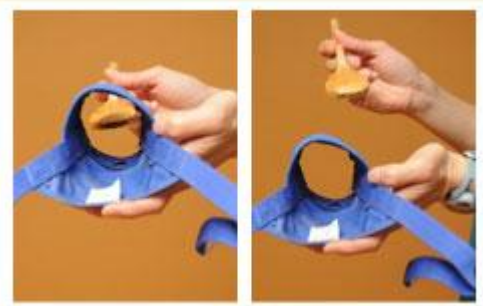
9.) Again after about 5-10 seconds remove the muzzle and the spoon so that she starts to associate the idea that the muzzle and spoon go together. In between muzzle presentations she should be looking at you expectantly for more treats.



10.) As before, once you're sure the dog's comfortable with the last step, move the peanut butter spoon further away so that the dog has to place her nose further into the muzzle.



11.) In this final step, you'll place the spoon with peanut butter outside of the muzzle so that the dog has to push her entire nose through the muzzle to get to the peanut butter.



12.) Be sure to hold the spoon in the center so you don't accidentally lure the dog to try to reach around the muzzle.



13.) Also, when you present the muzzle, be sure to hold the muzzle firmly so that the dog can shove her nose through and get used to the feel of the muzzle pressure on her face. Once she will reliably stick her nose through the muzzle and immediately does so, you can put the muzzle on.



14.) When you go to snap the muzzle on, hold the dog's collar so that the dog can't back away.



15.) Then with your other hand snap the muzzle on behind the dog's neck. Once the muzzle is on, continue to distract the dog with peanut butter if needed.