

Reactive Dog

Teaching Your Dog to Love the Muzzle



There are many types of muzzles available. Unless you need a muzzle for quick (less than one minute) procedures, such as changing a bandage, DO NOT use a soft cloth muzzle that closes the mouth, because with these muzzles, the dog cannot pant and may dangerously overheat very quickly.

The Baskerville Ultra muzzle (pictured) currently appears to be the most popular and functional muzzle available. Keep the muzzle in a drawer or otherwise out of sight unless you are training with it.



- 1) Bring the muzzle out, put it into your cupped hand to make a 'food bowl' with a tea- or tablespoon of a mix of your dog's regular food and favourite treats into your hand. Let your dog eat the food through the muzzle. While doing this training, let your dog eat all his food from the "muzzle bowl". Work on this until your dog cannot wait to put his nose into the muzzle.
- 2) Hold five soft, small, but high-value treats in one hand behind your back. Hold the muzzle with your other hand's fingers on the side of the muzzle, so that the front of the muzzle is accessible to give treats through. Present the muzzle to your dog and as soon as he puts his nose into it, give him the five treats, one at a time, through the front of the muzzle. To begin with, give the treats as quickly as you can, taking no more than five seconds to dispense the five treats. Work on this until you can take ten seconds to give the five treats.
- 3) Repeat as per #2, but in between giving each treat, quickly put your hand behind your back and bring it right back out again. Work on this until you can hold your hand behind your back for ten seconds while your dog holds his nose steadily inside the muzzle.
- 4) Keep the five treats in a pocket or on a side table and use your former treat hand to manipulate the straps, first for one second only, then give your dog his treat through the muzzle. Work on this until your dog can hold still inside the muzzle for ten seconds while you are manipulating the muzzle straps.
- 5) Put the muzzle fully on, feed five threats in quick succession through the muzzle, then immediately take it off, take a break and play with your dog. Work on this until you can feed one treat each ten seconds with the dog comfortably wearing the muzzle and expectantly waiting for the next treat.
- 6) Put the muzzle on, walk a step with your dog (off-leash at home) in between giving each treat. Work on this until you can take ten steps between each treat, with the dog comfortably and expectantly walking with you.
- 7) Repeat these exercises in different environments, gradually reducing the frequency of the treats until you can go for a walk with your dog willingly wearing the muzzle.

Once you offer the muzzle to your dog, MAKE SURE that you hold it still; NEVER chase your dog with it - if your dog doesn't want to put his nose into it, or if he wants to pull out, LET HIM. ***This is critically important. You MUST let the dog decide.*** If you chase him with the muzzle, he will become reluctant and you will have negated all your hard work up to this point and will have to start over. If he chooses not to put his nose in the muzzle, this is diagnostic: it tells us that we are working beyond his level of learning at this stage.

ADDITIONAL IMPORTANT POINTS

- Muzzles can come off if not properly fitted.
- The dog cannot bite with the Baskerville muzzle on, but he can still show all of the body language of stress or aggression, including an attempt to bite or muzzle punch if triggered by close proximity of another animal or person. This will both make your dog more reactive and it can still be dangerous to the other animal or person.
- If your dog has a bite history, or there is a risk that your dog might bite, KEEP YOUR DOG WELL AWAY from any animals and/or people that he may react to. Every over-threshold exposure to his triggers will make your dog's condition worse.
- The muzzle is only a safety tool, not a solution. If your dog has a bite history or there is a risk of a bite, you need to consult with a properly qualified behaviour specialist in order to resolve the underlying issue.
- The muzzle MUST NOT be used as a tool to let us expose the dog to triggers that are beyond his ability to cope.

Please ask your instructor for advice how to select and manage treats. ■

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This information is not a complete program, but only supplemental to class work or a consultation.

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