



Muzzle Acclimation Training Plan

Thank you for welcoming your new dog into your heart and home! We hope that you have many happy years together. Your new best friend is one of our shelter scholars. They were noted by our staff to benefit from wearing a muzzle and have worked with our trainer to feel comfortable wearing it. However, they will need your help to continue to be successful! Below is a step-by-step guide on how to acclimate your dog to wearing a muzzle.

A NOTE ON MUZZLES

Muzzled dogs have a lot of stigma, but dogs wear muzzles for many reasons! Examples include: defensive behaviors, on-leash reactivity, scavenging, leash biting, and more. A properly fitted muzzle should not be restrictive. Dogs should be able to fully open their mouth and pant and eat and drink water. However, the front of the muzzle should also be short enough that the handler can easily deliver treats. The muzzle should not have large holes or gaps and should be made of material the dog cannot bite through. Wire and vinyl muzzles are the most common and most recommended.

REQUIRED SUPPLIES

- Your dog
- You
- A muzzle
- High-value treats (note: they must be valuable to your dog)

STEP ONE: INTERACTION

Bring the muzzle out and reinforce the dog for interacting with it in any capacity. Over time, tighten your criteria to the dog putting his nose into the muzzle. Then, reinforce for putting his nose into the muzzle and holding it there. If your dog struggles to put his nose inside the muzzle, you can hold a treat inside as a lure. However, the treat lure should be removed as quickly as possible to prevent your dog from becoming dependent.

Tip: It is essential to go at your dog's pace. Rushing the process will create fear and discomfort.

STEP TWO: STRAPS

Now that your dog is willingly approaching the muzzle, putting her nose in, and holding it for several seconds, you can start to move the straps. Break it down into small pieces, moving one strap at a time and rewarding your dog for holding position.

Tip: Do not correct your dog for pulling away. We want them to communicate their discomfort! Accept the feedback and slow down.

STEP THREE: CLIP

Now that your dog is willingly standing with his nose in the muzzle while you move both straps, you can begin to clip it. At first, clip it and let the dog wear it for only a few seconds before unclipping. Then, extend the time as your dog is comfortable.

Tip: If your dog begins to paw at the muzzle, redirect them and reward them a few times for tolerating the muzzle before removing it. Then, decrease your time.

STEP FOUR: DURATION

Now you can begin to build time. Slowly increase your duration until your dog is comfortable wearing it for several minutes at home. Then, take it on a walk. Your dog may be confused and a little frustrated at first by being unable to pick up items or press their nose directly against the ground the way they did before. This is normal, but if your dog has been well-conditioned, they should adapt quickly.

Tip: You and your dog may get some stares, but pay them no mind. You know that you are setting your dog up for success. Remember: muzzled dogs are good dogs!