



**Muzzle training can be an easy and effective way to support your dog's welfare and safety during potentially stressful situations! Here are some helpful tips to get familiar with muzzles, adapted from the [BC SPCA's Using A Dog Muzzle](#) resource.**

## What Is a Muzzle & Why Use One?

A muzzle is a common piece of equipment worn over the snout of a dog to prevent from biting or scavenging food or other objects. While muzzles may have a poor reputation as only being used for 'aggressive' dogs, they are a helpful tool to have in your training kit. There are a variety of reasons to use a muzzle to help keep your dog, as well as those interacting with them, safe.

Muzzles can be used in different settings and may be needed in emergencies for safety. For this reason we recommend muzzle training for all dogs and thinking of it as an important life skill, even if you don't currently need to use a muzzle.

- 🐾 Muzzles can be used by other people in scenarios like grooming or veterinary treatments for safety, even if your dog is not used to wearing a muzzle.
- 🐾 If there is an emergency where your dog is injured and in pain they may bite someone who tries to touch them. Being able to wear a muzzle will help keep everyone safe.

If your dog is not used to a muzzle, having a muzzle put on them during a stressful event or trying to make them wear it too quickly may cause them to create negative associations with the muzzle and be resistant to wearing it in the future.

So, muzzle training your dog will make it easier to use one when needed and help to ensure they have positive associations with wearing a muzzle.

*Tip: Practice muzzle training and wearing a muzzle often. If a muzzle is only put on before or during negative experiences your dog may begin to associate the muzzle with those things, so try to practice often and make it fun!*

## **Q: Do Muzzles Harm Dogs?**

**A:** No – although they can limit mobility of the mouth and take some time to adjust to, provided your muzzle is a correct fit for the animal, they are not painful.

Some dogs who have had negative past experiences with muzzles, such as during a stressful procedure (i.e. grooming or nail trims) may have a negative emotional response. It is important to know that all dogs can be trained to be comfortable wearing a muzzle through positive reinforcement.

### When to Use a Muzzle

Here are some of the most common circumstances a muzzle should be used:

- If your dog is at risk of biting someone or another animal.
- If an animal control bylaw mandates that your dog must wear a muzzle.
- If your dog continuously scavenges objects from the ground.
- Your dog is at the groomer or veterinarian and may bite because they are frightened.
- You are working on training and need to keep everyone safe.



### When Not to Use a Muzzle

- To stop behaviours like barking or chewing: barking and chewing can be a result of something that needs a different training plan, like separation anxiety or boredom.
- As punishment: this may create negative associations with the muzzle that can make using it when needed very difficult, and it will not actually fix the problem you are punishing.
- To place them in stressful situations: for example, if your dog is fearful of other dogs and snaps or bites at them when overwhelmed, do not put a muzzle on your dog and then take them a dog park to help them learn to interact with dogs. The muzzle can prevent injury but will not actually address the emotions your dog feels or their reactions to stress. To help your dog cope with stressful situations a training plan will be needed.

### Recommended Muzzles

Be sure to select a muzzle that is designed for your dog's breed and size, as well as purpose.

- For Training & Walking – Basket muzzles (rubber, plastic, or metal) are the most common and humane choice. They allow dogs to drink water and pant to cool down.
- For Veterinary Use – Soft flat muzzles made of mesh, nylon, fabric, or leather and often used for exams, grooming, or other short-term procedures.



*NOTE: Soft muzzles prevent dogs from panting to cool down and are only for short term use.*

### How To Fit Your Dog

The muzzle should be:

- Snug, but not tight
- Allow the dog to open his mouth, but not all the way.
- Adjustable

When researching which muzzle to purchase, companies should have guidelines for sizing based on breed and size of dog. It can also be helpful to visit your local pet store or veterinarian and ask for assistance in finding the right fit for your dog.

### Be Aware:

- Even when your dog is comfortable wearing a muzzle, watch for triggers that frighten your pet and, when possible, avoid the situations altogether - even with the safety of a muzzle.
- Muzzles should not be used as a form of punishment or be left on all day.
- If you are using a muzzle to help prevent a behaviour also look for a certified dog trainer or behaviourist who uses positive reinforcement to help you muzzle train your dog and to create a behavioural modification program to address behavioural concerns.

## Muzzle Training

Below is a training plan that you can use to teach your dog how to enjoy wearing a muzzle! Work in three-minute sessions. Do not proceed to the next step unless your dog shows positive responses to the previous step.

If they are hesitant to progress to the next step go back a step and practice it more or try to make an adjustment like shortening how long the step is or how far you move something. Pay attention to your dog's body language. If they seem tense, avoidant, or uncomfortable slow down a little bit.

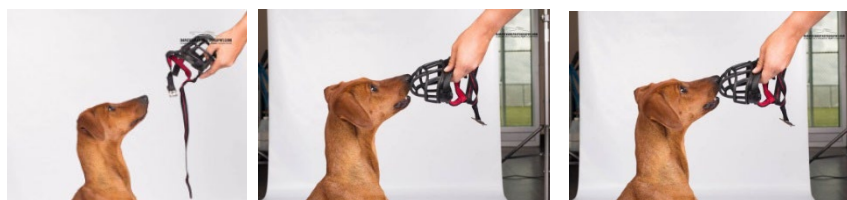
It is highly recommended that you work with a certified dog trainer or behaviourist who uses positive reinforcement to help your dog love their muzzle.

### **Step 1: Establish a positive relationship between the muzzle and your dog**

Show your dog the muzzle, say "yes", then provide a treat immediately. Repeat this multiple times, giving your dog a treat every time you present the muzzle. The goal is that your dog will learn that the muzzle = yummy treats! Your dog will look at the muzzle and then to you for a treat.

If your dog shows signs of fear or discomfort around a muzzle:

- Put it on table away from them and feed them on other side of room.
- Keep it at a distance where they'll eat treats when it is in sight.
- Practice this and gradually move the muzzle closer without causing signs of fear or discomfort



### Step 2: Shaping

Clip the muzzle around your dog's neck without putting it on their nose. Then give them high value treats using a pleasant voice. We want to slowly get our dog accustomed to the presence and feel of the muzzle using positive reinforcement.

### Step 3: Shaping

Place some treats into the muzzle (cup your hand so that the treats do not fall out). Present the muzzle to your dog and allow them to put their nose into the muzzle. Do not move the muzzle towards your dog or force them to wear it. Allow them to enter their nose freely into the muzzle and when they do, slowly move the muzzle away from your dog's nose as they start to eat the treats. This will help encourage your dog to move towards the muzzle.

### Step 4: Duration

Encourage duration of your dog's nose in the muzzle (try using peanut butter or cheese whiz). This will help your dog become comfortable having their nose in the muzzle for a period of time.

### Step 5: Shaping

Begin to move the straps around your dog's neck while your dog has their nose in the muzzle – do not attach them at this stage.



### Step 6: Shaping

Loosely attach straps around your dog's neck. Use squeeze cheese or a special treat to positively reinforce the sensation of the straps.

*NOTE: If your dog tries to paw at muzzle to remove it DO NOT immediately remove it.*

Distract your dog by asking for some behaviors that they enjoy doing, like sit or lay down. Remove the muzzle when they are no longer trying to remove it. If your dog constantly tries to remove muzzle, you have proceeded too quickly in your training plan. Return to earlier steps in the training plan and continue to positively reinforce any progress.

### Looking For More Help?

For other resources from trusted sources on Muzzle training, check out:

<https://muzzleupproject.com/resources/> OR <https://fearfreepets.com/teaching-muzzle-training-to-dogs/>

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