



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 piece of equipment worn over the snout of a dog to prevent them from biting or scavenging food or other objects from the ground. Muzzles have a poor reputation as only being used for 'aggressive' dogs. However, there are a variety of reasons to use a muzzle to help keep your dog, as well as those interacting with them, safe.

## Do Muzzles Harm Dogs?

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 Should I 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.



## 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 For A Muzzle

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 you should be aware of triggers that frighten your pet and understand that when possible, it is best to 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. Do not use a muzzle to stop a dog from barking. Muzzles should be used in conjunction with a behavioural modification program.
- Look for a certified dog trainer or behaviourist who uses positive reinforcement to help you address behavioural issues.

## 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.

It is highly recommended that you work with a certified dog trainer or behaviourist who uses positive reinforcement.

### **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 everytime 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.

## Additional Resources:

The Training Academy at the Edmonton Humane Society offers private consultations to manage a variety of behaviour challenges. For more information, visit our website:

<https://www.edmontonhumanesociety.com/what-we-do/education-training/dog-training/private-consultations/>

### Did You Know?

You can also ask us behaviour questions by emailing:

[askthespecialist@edmontonhumanesociety.com](mailto:askthespecialist@edmontonhumanesociety.com)

It takes approximately \$7 million to keep the Edmonton Humane Society operational for one year and 40% of these funds come from generous donations made by supporters like you. Please Donate.