

# KEEP CALM AND MUZZLE ON:

FEAR FREE  
HAPPY  
HOMES

Helping pets live happy, healthy, full lives



## Why Muzzle Training?

- Calmly and cooperatively wearing a muzzle is an important life skill for dogs.
- Training dogs to wear a muzzle is important so they become accustomed to it and will accept it readily when needed or advised for a specific purpose.
- A basket muzzle is an important safety tool that reduces the risk of an injurious bite during veterinary and home care.

## Muzzle Type Matters:

- Basket muzzles, typically made from hard or semi-flexible material, have multiple openings on the front and side that allow dogs to eat, drink, and pant.
- Flatter faced dogs such as Pugs and Bulldogs require specially designed muzzles. Air muzzles or Elizabethan collars are alternatives.

## Step 1: Start by Creating a Happy Response to the Muzzle

- Present the muzzle at a distance that sparks curious interest, without startling the dog (2 to 8 feet away).
- Hold the muzzle stationary in the hand rather than moving it toward the dog.
- Create a happy expectation that when the muzzle is out, good things happen! Pair the muzzle's presence with plentiful treats and other enjoyable consequences such as play.
- During training, take short, 30- to 60-second breaks to pause and move the muzzle out of sight (behind your back, for instance) to teach your dog that the muzzle itself predicts positive outcomes. When the muzzle goes away, treats stop or play ends.
- Place the muzzle out of sight after training.

## Step 2: Encourage Muzzle Approach

- Spread a soft treat on the outside of the muzzle edge, where the dog's nose and mouth will rest. Loose treats can also be threaded through the muzzle or kept cupped in the hand supporting the underside of the muzzle.
- Hold the muzzle stationary in your hand or place it between your knees to encourage your dog to approach the muzzle on her own terms (don't move the muzzle toward the dog).
- For dogs wary of a muzzle held in the hand, start with it placed on the ground. Clip a leash to the muzzle and keep it in hand to allow for easy retrieval and replenishing of treats. Treats can be placed in Hansel-and-Gretel-like fashion to encourage approach and investigation. Once the dog is comfortable, move to holding the muzzle.

### Step 3: Teach the Dog to Place Her Nose Inside

- Build the dog's desire to willingly place and keep her nose inside the muzzle by delivering treats through muzzle openings intermittently as her nose remains inside. The muzzle will not be attached until the next step.
- Deliver treats fast and frequently in the beginning. Gradually space out treat delivery as the dog becomes comfortable. Space treats at 1- to 2-second intervals, then increase the time between intervals. Reward randomly as you build up duration.
- If the dog pulls the nose out of the muzzle, the flow of treats stops, restarting only when the nose again moves toward the muzzle opening.
- Once you master this procedure, have your dog walk parallel alongside you as you give treats through the muzzle.

### Step 5: Muzzle Wearing

- As before, pair your dog's favorite activities or treats with wearing of the muzzle and build duration by rewarding quickly at the beginning. Gradually increase intervals between treats.
- Keep muzzle sessions short in the beginning, working up to longer periods over time.
- Avoid using the muzzle only during high stress events. Keep the muzzle positive by regularly pairing it with activities your dog enjoys.



### Step 4: Muzzle Placement

- Once your dog is comfortable placing the nose inside the muzzle, accustom her to strap placement and to short periods of wearing the muzzle.
- Ensure that the dog is accustomed to and comfortable with the sounds of clips or buckles before fastening the muzzle. Practice by opening and closing them with the muzzle away from your dog's face, pairing the sounds with plentiful treats.
- Consider having a helper on hand. One person can hold the muzzle and deliver treats while the other focuses on strap placement and adjustment.
- As an alternative, have the straps pre-hooked, but loose, so the muzzle slips easily over the dog's head as the muzzle is held up and then adjusted behind the head with a free hand as the dog moves the nose into the muzzle.
- Initially, keep muzzle straps loose if the muzzle's weight is supported in the hand. Before letting go of the muzzle or moving to longer periods with straps placed, ensure that the muzzle is first properly fitted to the dog's face.
- Reward intermittently as needed while straps are placed or adjusted.

### Notes:

- Emotional wellbeing and comfort are paramount during muzzle training and wearing. You must NEVER ignore stress signals and push through a situation with your dog if they are uncomfortable.
- If your dog appears fearful, avoidant or displays any signs of aggression, seek professional help, with your veterinary team, qualified veterinary or animal behaviorist, or Fear Free Animal Trainer.

For additional muzzle training resources, visit [FearFreeHappyHomes.com](https://FearFreeHappyHomes.com) and [muzzleupproject.com](https://muzzleupproject.com)