

Introducing a Collar, a Harness, Muzzle & Leash to Your Puppy!

You can introduce the equipment which you plan to use with your puppy as early as 4-6 weeks!

Start with a flat collar and long line (15').

If you use a 4-6' leash, be prepared to move with your puppy, to intentionally prevent pulling in leash so your puppy does NOT learn that pulling works. We much prefer a 15' long line so puppy can explore without tension on the leash!

If you are concerned puppy will startle or back out of his flat collar, a martingale collar is a great choice. The loop of the martingale collar will tighten (but not choke) if puppy struggles, to prevent the collar from slipping over his ears, and coming off.

If you choose a harness, be sure it has a D-Ring at the chest - this helps you to steer the dog, and can help direct your puppy when pulling. If he pulls, he'll just end up turning back to you! In addition, D-Rings clipped on the back will keep all pressure off puppy's neck, and allow for much more freedom as your puppy learns about the world around him. And, the harness should be a 'y' shape in front, & should NOT cross puppy's shoulders where it might impede his gait. (we love Blue 9 Balance Harness)

A Head Halter is an alternative, especially for hard pullers. It can give you 'power steering' - where the head goes, the dog will follow. A properly fitted head halter does not sit on the dog's neck, but along their jawbones. Conditioning your puppy to accept a head halter, is best done while they are young, just in case you find you need one, or a muzzle, in the future. Your dog can still eat, drink and bark!



Fitting Collars:

Flat Collar: When fitted properly, you should be able to fit 2 fingers between your dog's neck & the collar.



Martingale Collar: bring the 2 D-rings on either side of the loop together, so that it is a snug (but not choking) fit around puppy's neck. When relaxed, the 'loop' provides added room in the collar for a loose, comfortable fit.



Head Halter: 1 finger fit in the neckband, noseband loose enough to pull forward, to the top edge of the muzzle, where the dog's nose begins). You may never need a Head Halter, but it's beneficial to condition your puppies early, just in case it would be helpful later on.



Harness: check out Blue 9 Balance Harness' video for advice on fitting. In general be sure you have a harness that has a 'Y' at the chest, and look for 2 finger fit at each attachment strap.

NOTE: just in case you find you need one later, muzzles should also be conditioned early in much the same way! Better to have your puppy be comfy with the muzzle now, than add more stress later if he needs it, and hates it.

We like Baskerville Muzzles.

*many companies also make appropriate muzzles for brachiocephalic breeds.



Once you have settled on a collar, harness and leash (and muzzle!), introduce puppy to the equipment! Start indoors: there are fewer distractions! Move outdoors only when puppy is doing well inside:

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1.) Condition puppy to love and accept his collar with "baby steps" and lots of treats.

Stretch out the steps over several short training sessions.

- 1.) Let him just sniff the collar, treat;
- 2.) put his collar close to his head, treat;
- 3.) start to wrap the collar around his neck, treat;
- 4.) hold the collar in place, treat;
- 5.) clip the collar in place, 2-3 treats!

*Do the same conditioning process with his Harness, baby steps, lots of treats.

Kiko Pup Video - Conditioning a Harness www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=k7edMjwEY1c

First, teach her that the clip sound on the harness means treats are coming, so that when you get to the final stage of putting the harness on and clipping it, that's an automatic "YAY" moment for the dog. Doing this first also creates a positive association with the sight of the harness.

Next, teach "head through": mark & reinforce any interest or movement towards the harness, Hold the front portion of the harness open on your fingers, mark & reinforce any interest or movement towards the open harness. Then, wait and mark only when the dog puts his nose through the harness, even a little.

HINT: if necessary you can use a 'hand target' or 'touch' (or if absolutely necessary use a treat lure) through the open harness to help puppy put his head through.

Build up to just holding the harness out & waiting for the puppy to put his head through.

NOTE: Keep the harness held up & open, so he can back out if he wants. If puppy backs away at any point, just stay where you are or move away and wait for your puppy to put his head back through the harness. If he's backing out a lot, you are going to fast.

Now, test to see if he is truly willing to put his head in through the harness. Move the harness around so he has to work to get to where the harness is and to put his head through.

NOTE: if the harness requires you to pick up puppy's paw to put it through, condition the puppy to lift their own paw, by using 'Give Paw' training to accomplish that!

Next, the leash or long line:

1.) Puppies love to follow, so just clip on a light weight leash, and let him drag it around as he follows you. A 'house line' (a leash with no handle or with the handle cut off so it doesn't get caught on things) is a great idea to help manage your puppy and prevent mischievous behaviors right from the start.

2.) Let puppy know you have some tasty treats & then simply walk away from him, with your back to him. Once puppy comes into your side, slip him a treat. Turn in another direction & walk again. When puppy catches up to come into your side again, slip him another treat. Puppy will naturally follow at this young age - reinforce that behavior.

3.) clip on his leash, then call him to his meal! He is certain to move with that leash on now!

4.) Next, pick up the leash and do the same exercise. When puppy is at your side, give a treat. Turn, and repeat!

If puppy pulls on leash, off to the side or out in front of you, simply FREEZE, just stop, and wait for puppy to look back at you! As soon as he does, say, 'Yes, Good Puppy' and start walking again! When puppy is successfully walking at your side, give lots of treats!

If puppy bites and nips at his leash: Simply, distract him from doing so with a silly voice, and running away a bit to get him interested in following you, wiggling a toy, or by playing a game of 'search'. Of course, you can also use the leash in a game of 'Choice!' (intentionally training him that he should not put the leash in his mouth)

If puppy lunges on leash, redirect his attention away from the 'thing' with a treat, a toy, or simply saying, 'This Way', & walking him, in the opposite direction or by playing a game of 'search'. When he is far enough away to give you attention, let puppy look & investigate even...finding his own way calmly will make the thing less scary or less interesting/exciting over time.

If puppy barks on leash, distract him with a 'sit' or 'down', or Hand Targets or Tug or a simple game of 'search'! He can't bark if he is busy 'playing', and eventually the thing that made him bark, becomes background noise!

You are laying the groundwork for nice "loose leash walking" with your puppy! Yay!

(Source: Kiko Pup; <https://www.pupbox.com/training/leash-train-puppy/>)