

Does Your Dog Become Distressed and Reactive While Being Examined?

Muzzle Training

If your dog becomes distressed and/or reactive while being physically examined it is worth investing in a basket muzzle and teaching your dog to wear it with confidence. You never know when your dog might become ill or injured and become fearfully reactive to necessary handling for grooming and veterinary treatment. If he is used to and comfortable wearing a muzzle it is one less area of stress for dog owner and veterinary or grooming staff. Although most vet centre's and salons keep muzzles in a range of sizes, which are cleaned and disinfected after each use, it will be much more acceptable to your dog to wear a piece of equipment which he has a positive association with and which bears his own scent.

- Allow the dog to sniff and look at the muzzle, rewarding any interest with tasty treats.
- Place a treat just inside the muzzle and allow the dog to take it out.
- Progress slowly until you are able to post a treat through the hole in the end of the muzzle and your dog will put his/her nose right inside to take it.
- To progress, gently hold the straps behind the dog's ears as he takes the treat. If he panics and tries to shake off the muzzle, withhold the treat and allow him to shake the muzzle off. Be patient, give your dog time to advance and retreat at this stage, until he is prepared to take the treat out of the muzzle repeatedly and allow you to gently hold the straps behind his ears.
- When he is confident with the above the straps can be held behind his ears. The next stage is to loosely secure the strap. Keep distracting the dog with tit-bits so that he becomes used to the feel of the muzzle. Do not panic or tell him off if he shakes the muzzle off – just withhold the food until his nose is back inside the muzzle.
- When he is totally comfortable with putting his nose into the muzzle and does not shake it off the straps can be tightened to fit properly.
- Continue to occasionally put the muzzle on at home and feed tasty treats so that it is most often associated with pleasant experiences for your dog and not just a visit to the vet or groomer.
- If you know that your dog is reactive when being examined by the vet, put the muzzle on your dog while in the car so that he is as confident and stress free as possible before the examination.

TEMPTATIONS TO AVOID:

- **ANY** attempt to correct the dog verbally or hold the muzzle on. The dog will quickly learn to accept the slight restriction in order to get the treat so be patient.
- Only do up the straps behind the dog's ears when he is comfortable with putting his nose into the muzzle calmly and accepting it.