

Helen Taylor, Certificated Clinical Animal Behaviourist (CCAB)

Settlands, Sackmore Lane, Marnhull, DT10 1PN

Tel: 07951 985193 Email: info@helentaylordorset.co.uk web: www.helentaylordorset.co.uk

Introducing a muzzle

This handout describes how to introduce and use a Baskerville® muzzle to your dog. Fabric muzzles are not suitable as, if fitted tightly enough to prevent biting, do not allow panting, taking treats or drinking, and can be dangerous.

When conducting these exercises, it is useful to have two people available as some of them require more than 2 hands!

Correctly fitted, the right size of Baskerville muzzle will not push against the end of your dog's nose, nor will it ride into his eyes under normal usage. He should be able to open his mouth enough to easily take a treat, drink and pant (although not necessarily fully). The plastic shortening piece in the end of the muzzle can be removed as it serves no useful purpose. If a standard Baskerville muzzle does not fit your dog's face properly, more success may be achieved with a "Baskerville Ultra".

1. First teach your dog that good things happen whenever the muzzle appears. Bring the muzzle out from behind your back, and with the other hand, feed or throw him a treat (or a toy). Do this repeatedly until he reacts with happy anticipation when the muzzle is produced.
2. Next, attach the muzzle snugly around your dog's neck with the muzzle piece hanging down (it not over your dog's nose). Note if your dog is nervous or likely to spook at this stage, ensure he is either on a lead or in a small enclosed space (so that he cannot bolt). Continue to throw food and toys for a minute or two before taking the muzzle off again. Repeat this many times.
3. Next hold the muzzle below the dog's face with pieces of treat in the end (if necessary put your hand under the weave to prevent the treats falling out) and praise him as he eats them. Do not push the muzzle into the dog's face, but allow him to put his face into the muzzle. Always remove the muzzle while your dog is still eating out of it, so that he does not learn a habit of pulling his head out of the muzzle. Use a top-level treat that the dog doesn't usually get. Repeat this exercise many times.
4. It then may be helpful to use baby food or squeezey cheese squirted through the end of the muzzle so that the dog gets a gradual trickle of food for keeping his nose in the muzzle for an extended period.
5. Gradually extend the period that he keeps his nose in – voluntarily – by delaying the treat until you say he can take his nose out so he is effectively "targeting" the tip of the muzzle (see the final video clip for an example of this in action).



...Helping your best friend to be even better...

All written content and advice including reports, emails, appendices and handouts, are copyright Helen Taylor and strictly confidential (unless otherwise specified), and may not be distributed or shared without written permission.

6. Once he is happily putting his snout into the muzzle to get treats, next, while he is eating treats from the muzzle, fold the fastening strap across his neck lightly and repeatedly, without actually fastening them. Hold the fastening strap together for a couple of seconds with increasing pressure while feeding him treats through the side of the muzzle so he will feel a slight pressure.
7. Hold his collar with one hand, and fasten the straps at the back of the head while feeding him treats through the muzzle (for some dogs, two people are necessary for this step, for others two are still helpful!). Hold both the muzzle strap and the collar in the same hand to keep his head still. Keep feeding him for a few seconds then take the muzzle off.
8. Repeat 4 above for longer and longer periods. After a few repetitions, let go of his collar and muzzle strap while you do it and continue feeding him treats but replace it if he fusses or tries to get the muzzle off. At this stage, start attaching the muzzle as you would in a live situation so that he CANNOT get it off – loop the fastening clip under his collar so it cannot come off.
9. Gradually extend the period you keep the muzzle on for and space out the treats slightly so he is not being continually fed. When you take the muzzle off each time, stop feeding treats.
10. Gradually start letting go of the muzzle strap and collar as he learns not to fuss the muzzle until you can put the muzzle on and he will not try to remove it or fuss it.

Notes:

Although Youtube videos are liable to change, currently the following are useful demonstrations of this process:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1FABgZTFvHo>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1FABgZTFvHo&list=UUEX7qRAzUH_nmQn_hiLo2lg&index=30

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6BjPpXer8IE&sns=em>

This last video shows a late stage of muzzle-training, where the dog (Jack) has learned to “target” the inside of the tip of his muzzle – until his owner tells him he has done enough to earn a reward. Watch his happy body language when he sees the muzzle!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2_ADyVZG0BM

Other tips

If he bats at the muzzle or runs it along the floor, this indicates that more training at the earlier Do not leave him unrestrained until he no longer fusses or attempts to remove the muzzle.

Even once the dog has been introduced to the muzzle and accepts it well, keep doing desensitisation exercises a few times a week. DO NOT only put it on when he “needs” it otherwise he will associate it with stressful situations. Never take the muzzle off when he is fussing it – only when he is calm and accepting it. Always ensure the muzzle cannot come off by accident (ie loop it through the collar). If he learns he can occasionally get the muzzle off by fussing it, it will greatly strengthen the (fussing) behaviour. For the smaller sizes, a single piece can be cut out of the side of the muzzle to facilitate the process of feeding treats through.