

Special Equipment for Handling Dogs

Our topics for this week are:

- Head collars
- Compression jackets
- Capture poles
- Leather gloves with gauntlets
- Head movement limiting devices
- Shock collars
- Vibrating, spraying, and ultrasonic collars
- Blindfold caps
- Mobility assistance devices

Head Collars

Head collars (halter-type collars) are used for training dogs not to pull on a leash. Head collars have straps that go behind the head and over the nose just in front of the eyes; the leash attaches to a ring below the throat. Pulling on the leash applies pressure to the back of the head, pulls the nose down, turns the head, and closes the mouth. The effect is based on a dominant dog's method of grasping the muzzle of a subordinate dog to establish or reassert its higher social rank. The movement insists on attention to the handler. The pulling power of the muzzle is much less than the pulling power of a collar on the neck. To be effective, more detailed fitting is required than for other collars. To properly use a head collar, tension on the leash should be steady. Jerking and release of the leash is not appropriate. These are not true restraint devices and should not be left on when not attached to a hand-held leash.

Compression Jackets

Compression on the trunk of the body by a snug jacket may alleviate anxiety in dogs. However, adaptation or desensitization will occur with a loss of effect in about 20 minutes. Compression jackets have been particularly advocated for dogs with thunderstorm anxiety.

Capture Poles

Capture poles (inappropriately called "rabies poles") are hollow metal handles with a rope or wire cable that is fixed at the catching end and forms a loop. The free end of the rope or cable goes through the handle to the handler's end of the pole. The loop is used to catch dangerous dogs by the neck and can injure the trachea (windpipe) if used with too much force. The loop is a coated cable which should be checked each time before use to ensure no wire strands have become frayed by prior use and become exposed which could injure the animal's neck. The loop is spring released by a knob on the handler's end. The recoil can cause the cable to whip at the handler's end. The handler must take care not to get whipped by the wire, or whip a bystander, when the loop is released. The handler should hold the release knob with his first two fingers and the wire with the last two fingers and heel of his hand to control the wire and prevent it from whipping when the loop is released. Dogs (or any other animal) should never be lifted by the

neck alone using a capture pole because severe damage may occur to the trachea or because struggling when dangling could break its neck.

To apply a capture pole loop, the handler must restrict the evasive movement of the dog as much as possible. It is important to have a slow, deliberate, and persistent approach with the pole. The dog's head should be approached slowly with the loop to reduce the risk of bumping its head, eyes, or teeth with the end of the pole. Dogs often will bite at the pole which should not be withdrawn when this happens due to the possibility of injuring the dog's teeth and seeming submissive to the dog's actions. If the pole is not withdrawn when the dog bites, it will eventually ignore it. Some dogs learn to lower their head to the floor as an evasive maneuver. The handler must be patient and slowly continue to get the loop to slip over the nose and then the head. Once the dog has been captured, the dog's end of the pole should be pushed into a corner to control its body movements. Dogs should not be led or dragged by a capture pole.

Leather Gloves with Gauntlets

Gloves with forearm covers (gauntlets) can sometimes be useful in handling small dogs that bite. However, care must be taken not to restrain a small dog too tightly while wearing gloves. Gloves can reduce the sensitivity of the handler's hands to the amount of pressure being applied. Gloves should be large enough that the handler's fingers do not extend to the end. The extra length likely to be bitten by a dog can reduce danger to the fingers.

Restraint gloves are difficult to clean, and the odors from previously restrained dogs on gloves and gauntlets may increase the stress and apprehension of some dogs.

Head Movement-Limiting Devices

Elizabethan collars are named for the large collars on dresses that were made fashionable by Queen Elizabeth I in the 1550's. Elizabethan collars for dogs are cone-shaped collars that fit around the neck with the outer edge toward the dog's nose. The head is surrounded 360 degrees on the sides, top, and bottom by the collar preventing the dog from chewing most of its body, although it may still reach its front feet. However, peripheral sight and hearing are impaired by the collars. Some dogs cannot reach food and water with Elizabethan collars, and the collar must be removed often to allow eating and drinking. Collars are bulky and will catch on doors, furniture, scrubs, and other objects. Poorly made or fitted collars can injure the neck with sharp edges. Any rough or sharp edge should be well padded with layers of medical adhesive tape.

Spherical semi-opaque (globe-shield) collars that encapsulate the head and have a opening in front for breathing and vision are commercially available as a means to protect handlers from bites. Spherical collars do not allow drinking or eating and must be frequently taken on and off which could increase the risk of being bitten.

Thick broad collars wrap snugly around the neck like a human cervical collar to limit the dog's ability to reach areas of its body. Some are pneumatic. A retention strap is run from the top of the broad band around the lower aspect of the thorax behind the front legs. Broad band neck collars permit better peripheral vision and hearing and does not catch on objects as does the Elizabethan collar. Eating and drinking are not blocked. However, access of most of the front legs is possible.

Shock Collars

Shock collars are electronic collars with metal contact points that press on the skin of the neck.

A remote control operated by the handler activates a shock when desired. Shock collars often cause aversive behaviors in dogs. Vibration warnings before a shock and adjusting the voltage before use are proposed safety features. However, warning vibrations are ineffective if an association with a following shock is not first established. In addition, if a shock is delivered the voltage is not quickly adjustable to the situation as is use of a choke chain. Dogs that get wet during training can get a higher than intended voltage. For these and other reasons, shock collars should never be used on puppies.

Shock collars are often viewed by inexperienced handlers as a shortcut to training or a quick fix for bad behavior. The use of shock collars should be limited to experienced trainers as a tool to consider if traditional methods are not effective improving a seemingly incorrigible adult dog's bad behavior. In selected cases, proper short-term use of a shock collar by an experienced trainer may salvage a dog from being relinquished to a shelter or euthanized.

Vibrating, Spraying, and Ultrasonic Collars

Vibrating collars work with a remote control similar to shock collars without the risk of pain to the dog and aversion. They are not reliable training tools. Some dogs can become desensitized to vibration and ignore the stimulus. However, they can be helpful in providing command signals to a deaf dog.

Collars that emit a spray of citronella or an ultrasonic noise are also available. Typically, these are used to discourage barking. They are activated when any dog within sensor range barks and can deliver a spray or ultrasonic burst to an innocent dog wearing the collar.

Blindfold Caps

Blindfolds of sheer fabric attached to a dog's head and eyes like a cap have been suggested to have a calming effect on dogs. Blindfolds are effective in horses, but dog caps for blindfolding dogs are not opaque and dogs do not depend as much on their sight for assessing potential threats as do horses. Evidence of the effectiveness of dog blindfold caps is only anecdotal, but dimming light with a transparent blindfold, or otherwise, may have calming effects on some dogs in a quiet environment with no strange odors present. However, they may also exacerbate startle responses.

Mobility Assistance

Dogs with an inability to control their hind legs (paraparesis) or move their hindlegs (paraplegia) require assistance in walking that can be provided with a rear or body harness or a support sling. In the absence of either, a towel or belt can be used as a support sling under the abdomen. Two wheel carts that support the dog's mid-section and hindquarters permit mobility even when the dog cannot otherwise stand on its hind legs due to paralysis or paresis.

Now, let's recap the key points to remember from today's episode:

- If not used properly, capture poles can be hazardous to dogs and handlers
- Heavy leather gloves with gauntlets are rarely helpful in handling dogs
- Shock, vibrating, spraying, or ultrasonic collars are unreliable training tools for dogs

More information on animal handling is available in my book, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint* published by CRC Press. It is also available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Don't forget serious injury or death can result from handling and restraining some animals. Safe and effective handling and restraint requires experience and continual practice. Acquisition of the needed skills should be under the supervision of an experienced animal handler.