

Proper Use of Muzzles on Dogs

Our topics for this week are:

- **When muzzles are needed**
- **Types of muzzles**
- **When muzzles are not appropriate**
- **Emergency muzzles**
- **Training dogs to accept a muzzle**

Muzzles on dogs are used for short-term safety of the dog's handlers, other animals, or the dog itself. They can prevent a dog from biting others or unwanted scavenging or wound licking. Dogs may need to be prevented from biting due to excitement, aggression, pain, or fear. Muzzles may be needed to prevent dogs from ingesting rodent poison baits. They are commonly used on military, police, security, and racing dogs for public safety or the safety of other dogs.. Muzzles may be mandated by law for vicious dogs, but it is important to realize that not all dogs wearing a muzzle are vicious.

When Muzzles are Needed

- **During an emergency**

An injured or frightened dog is a bite risk. Before trying to move an injured dog, its head should be immobilized by a thick towel or similar bundling clothing, or it should have a muzzle applied.
- **There is a history of biting, or a risk of biting**

If a dog has aggressive tendencies or has bitten another dog or a person in the past, a muzzle should be used when around strangers such as veterinarians, groomers, pet sitters, and others.
- **When required due to breed-specific legislation**

Unfortunately, some states or provinces have breed specific legislation, which requires certain so-called "dangerous breeds" to wear a muzzle when not on private property.

Types of Muzzles

There are two main types of commercial muzzles: open-ended muzzles and closed-ended muzzles. Neither type eliminates all risk of being nipped or bruised by a thrashing dog's head or teeth. You can also make a homemade muzzle in an emergency if there is no other choice.

- **Closed-Ended Muzzles**

The most common closed-ended muzzles are basket muzzles. They are made of leather, wire, plastic, or rubber. Closed end muzzles allow dogs to open their mouths to pant and drink. Due to their semi-rigid structure, they are easy for one person to apply. Straps that close with buckles are quiet and secure but slow to use. Velcro attachments for straps are quick but produce a ripping sound when being removed.

- **Open End Muzzles**

Open end muzzles are more form fitting and hold the dog's mouth closed. They are made of nylon, mesh, or leather. Open end muzzles prevent dogs from panting, barking, or drinking. Since panting is the primary means dogs can dissipate heat, these muzzles should only be used for very short periods of time and never in hot weather. They should be adjusted so that there is just enough room to open the mouth to allow the dog to lick its nose. These muzzles also prevent dogs from barking or eating. If the dog has recently eaten or been given treats, there is risk of vomiting. With a closed end muzzle on when the dog vomits, the vomitus will be inhaled and cause damage to the respiratory tract.

When a Muzzle is not Appropriate

Do not use a muzzle on a dog for barking, chewing, or other ongoing behavioral problems. These require long-term solutions. Never muzzle a dog to punish it for bad behavior. Do not use a closed end muzzle if the dog has a history or signs of vomiting or respiratory problems. A muzzle is never appropriate if the dog might be left unattended even for a short time.

It is also inappropriate to use an unsanitary muzzle. That means muzzles should not be shared among dogs without appropriate sanitizing between uses. Food should not be smeared inside to entice acceptance of the muzzle. Food should not be provided in any manner while a dog is wearing a muzzle. Fabric can be washed, plastic or wire can be wiped with disinfectants. Leather is more difficult to clean and requires wiping and rinsing, use of neatsfoot oil, and then application of wax.

Emergency Muzzles

A dog with an injury from being hit by a car, being bitten by another dog, or other acute physical injury should be muzzled. Emergency muzzles can be created from strips of available cloth such

as T-shirts, pillowcases, scarfs, and similar materials. A 20 lb dog would require about 2 arm's length of cloth. The proper tie involves a double overhand knot tied on top of the dog's upper jaw that is used to pull the mouth closed, a single overhand knot tied below the lower jaw, and finally a bowknot tied behind the dog's neck just underneath the ears. The muzzle should be removed as soon as the dog and its handlers are safe, for example at a veterinary hospital. If inexperienced in tying emergency muzzles, immobilization of the head by a second handler using a towel or blanket is best.

Training a Dog to Accept a Muzzle

All dogs should be taught to accept a muzzle during basic training. This is done with small steps of less than 15 minutes over several days, beginning with just starting to apply the muzzle, stop and withdraw, and reward. This is done repeatedly until the dog is comfortable with that stage and then apply the muzzle further, withdraw and reward. Rewards should be small food treats and verbal praise. Never allow a dog to paw at its muzzle. This can cause eye or mouth injuries and become an effective method of escape. Being unafraid of a muzzle can reduce both the dog's and handler's stress when a muzzle is needed in the future.

If you have comments or you're interested in particular subjects contact us at CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com

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

- 1. Muzzles are only for short-term use and require close supervision.**
- 2. Dogs should be trained to accept muzzles as puppies.**
- 3. Emergency muzzles or materials to create a muzzle should be readily available, especially when traveling.**

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

Additional information is available at: www.betteranimalhandling.com

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.