

Today's episode is on:

Basic Equipment for Handling Dogs

Our topics for this week are:

- Leashes, including
 - Slip leashes
 - Snap leashes and retractable leashes
- Collars, including
 - Flat and rolled collars
 - Choke (attention) collars
 - Martingale and prong collars
- Chest harnesses
- Towels and blankets
- Tables and table covers
- Muzzles, including
 - Commercial muzzles
 - Gauze muzzles
 - Makeshift muzzles

Basic Handling Equipment

When handling a dog other than the handler's personal pet, a slip leash is the most useful equipment. All dogs (and cats) in a veterinary clinic or boarding kennel should have a slip leash on when taken outside a cage or kennel. All dogs taken outside a building without a secondary barrier to escape (fence) should have a chest harness with an attached leash.

Leashes

Slip Leashes

A slip leash is a rope, cord, or flat woven strap with a metal ring honda or tied honda knot used for routine handling of dogs. Flat, strap slip leashes should not be used due to their inability to maintain an open loop when being placed over the dog's head and neck. A slip leash serves as a sliding collar and lead rope in one piece. It can be tightened when needed to gain the dog's attention and released to reward proper responses. It also provides greater security against escape than a fixed collar and snap leash.

Handlers traditionally stand or walk with the dog on the handler's left side. For the slip leash to loosen when desired properly the honda end of the leash should go clockwise around the dog's neck. This will orient the honda end of the leash pointing upward on the side of the dog's neck. This allows the neck loop to loosen when tension is released on the leash.

The handler should not stand in front and extend his hands toward the dog to place a slip leash. This posture is intimidating to dogs. When dealing with fractious dogs, a string should be

tied to the leash's honda. The slip leash can then be loosened by pulling on the string and removed without placing a hand near the dog's head.

Slip leashes should not be used on dogs with breathing problems. If an alternative does not exist, the loop should be placed around the neck with one front leg through it to prevent pressure on the trachea. Dogs should never be tied and left unattended with a slip leash because either escape or strangulation may result.

Slip leashes should not be wrapped around the muzzle and held in place by the ends to form a temporary muzzle. The neck loop could be too tight when the loops around the muzzle are made. Plus, a one-handed muzzle is more effective and better tolerated.

Snap Leashes and Retractable Leashes

Snap leashes should be attached only to a choke collar, head collar, or chest harness. Attachment to a fixed buckle collar is not secure restraint to prevent an escape since many dogs with back away while pulling on the collar and shaking their head.

Training leashes are four to six feet long. A retractable leash is a snap band or cord leash that is 10 to 26 feet long and can be spring wound similar to the action of a retractable measuring tape. Retractable leashes offer minimal control of dogs and should only be used in open spaces.

Collars

Flat and Rolled (Fixed Buckle) Collars

Flat fabric or flat or rolled leather collars with a buckle or plastic snap closure is used for identification purposes and routine restraint of puppies or sensitive small dogs. Collars should allow 2 fingers to be easily slipped underneath or the collar is too tight.

Leashes should not be attached to flat or rolled collars for reliable restraint. Even if the collar is properly fitted, the dog may be able to back up, shake its head, and escape.

Choke (Attention) Chain Collars

Choke chain collars are similar to slip leashes. The term "choke" is a misnomer since the goal is not to choke the dog. A choke chain tightens quickly around the neck and releases quickly when tension is released on an attached leash. A more accurate name would have been an "attention chain". Pulls should be to the side and not upwards which can cause excessive compression around the neck. For the handler to be on the right side of the dog's body, the collar's loop should go clockwise around the dog's neck. If applied counter clockwise, the loop will not fully release when tension is removed on the attached leash.

Dogs must continually walk on the same, traditionally left, side of the handler. The chain will not be oriented correctly when on the other side of the handler. Choke collars should only be used for training purposes and when the dog is on a hand-held leash. Otherwise, there is risk of strangulation if tied or if the collar becomes caught on an object.

Choke collars, as with any restraint equipment, can be misused and cause aversive behaviors. Unlike shock collars, choke collars are training tools that can deliver attention-to-the-handler getting signals appropriate to situations that may quickly vary. They are not intended to cause injury or pain. Used with proper discretion and timing, a choke collar can be a safe, useful communication tool between handlers and dogs and does not cause aversive behaviors.

Martingale and Prong Collars

Martingale collars are flat collars with rings at both ends and a chain that goes through each ring. The chain also has rings at each end. The size of the flat collar can be adjusted in size so that the extent of squeeze on the neck, when the leash is pulled, can be modified. Unlike choke collars, martingale collars cannot be put on backwards and will work the same if the dog changes from one side of the handler to the other. Since they are flat collars and the pressure delivered to the dog's neck from tension on the leash is less than a choke collar, martingale collars can be more easily ignored than choke collars by inattentive dogs.

Thick-haired dogs may have sufficient hair padding on their neck to ignore the pressure of a basic martingale collar.

Blunted prongs can produce better responsiveness without causing injury.

Martingale collars are also called limited slip collars because they are less likely to slip off if the dog pulls back on the collar and leash. For this reason, they are often used on sight hounds, such as Afghans, which have narrow heads.

Chest Harness

Chest harnesses cannot strangle dogs and will not slip off if the dog pulls backward on a leash. All dogs without advanced leash or voice command training taken outside a building or security enclosure and all dogs being transported by car should have a harness with attached leash on to prevent escape or strangulation if they escape. Vicious dogs may be more easily handled and tractable by wearing both a harness and a leash that cannot be chewed in two (chain or heavy wire). Upon return of the dog to a cage, the harness is removed first and the leash is removed during the dog's return to its cage.

Towels and Blankets

A towel or blanket that a dog is familiar with and has the dog's or owner's scent on it can be comforting to a dog and reduce its fear when handled. Towels or blankets can be used to cover the dog's head to facilitate grasping the neck for head restraint. They can also be rolled into a bulky soft collar to go around the neck for mild restraint of the head. An aggressive dog can be distracted with towels or blankets and allowed to bite them while the handler's other hand approaches from the rear to capture and restrain the dog.

When using a towel or blanket over a dog's head, the scruff hold should not be attempted. It is safer and more effective to grasp both sides of the neck (two hands neck hold) just behind the ears with thumbs on the back of the head and fingers underneath the mandible.

Tables and Table Covers

Tables that place a dog at the handler's waist height will eliminate the leaning position which is intimidating to dogs. A slick table top, in addition to the height, reduces most dogs' desire to escape. Tables with surfaces that provide traction can embolden some dogs to struggle to jump off that would not try otherwise. Slick top tables are also easier to clean and disinfect and therefore best for general use.

Some nonaggressive dogs may feel too insecure on a slick table and need a washable pad

on the table that provides traction, insulation, and can be easily sanitized after use. Sanitation should never be compromised by using a table surface that provides traction and warmth but cannot be sanitized after each use.

Whenever a dog is on a table, someone's hand or hands must always be on it to prevent it from trying to jump off. Grooming tables with a grooming arm (an table attachment for a leash) should have a neck loop and quick release to prevent strangulation if the dog falls or jumps off the table. Dogs should never be encouraged to jump onto or off of an exam or grooming table. Jumping off a table will encourage future attempts to jump. If steps or a ramp are used to allow dogs to walk up onto tables, the surface of the steps or ramp should be skid-proof but easily sanitized.

Tables with four corner legs are much more stable than a single pedestal table or scissors-action variable height table. Pedestal tables should be bolted to the floor to prevent tipping with heavy dogs when the dog is not properly centered on the table.

Muzzles

Although muzzles can provide a degree of safety from being bitten by a dog during handling, the use of muzzles on dogs can make dogs more fearful of handling. They can be dangerous to the dog when used on older dogs or dogs with respiratory or digestive problems. Muzzles should be used selectively and not as standard policy.

Muzzles will not prevent a handler from being injured by a dog. Dogs wearing a muzzle can cause painful injury by bruising the bones of the hands or face attempting to bite a handler. Fortunately, dogs often become more submissive and easy to handle if a muzzle is applied.

Muzzles used between dogs can be a highly effective fomite (object that transmits disease). They can also cause injury to the dog when improperly used. Muzzles should be clean, sanitary, and smooth where it touches the dog's face. It should be determined that the fasteners work easily before attempting to use a muzzle. A muzzle should not impinge on the dog's eyes. The dog should not be allowed to paw at the muzzle as injury to the face or removal of the muzzle may occur.

Styles are open-ended ("sleeve") or basket muzzles. Open-end muzzles are open at the end and keep the mouth from opening any further than to be able to lick. Panting or drinking water is not possible. Basket muzzles are closed on the end and allow the mouth to open. They are made of plastic or wire. Basket muzzles allow dogs to pant and to drink water.

Dogs that have recently vomited or have respiratory distress should not be muzzled. Brachycephalics (short-nosed) dogs are better restrained by a rolled towel around the neck and behind the ears than by a muzzle. Dogs with an open-ended muzzle cannot pant and therefore cannot cool their bodies if their mouth is held shut and will overheat. If they vomit, the vomitus will be inhaled into the lungs and can cause fatal pneumonia. A muzzle should never be left on longer than necessary for handling, and a dog should never be left unattended with an open-ended muzzle on.

Commercial Muzzles

Commercial muzzles are strong, pre-shaped, and easy to apply and fasten. Their disadvantages are cost, difficulty in sanitizing, and the need for multiple sizes if many types or ages of dogs are being handled. Commercial muzzles are made of leather, wire, plastic, or nylon.

Leather, plastic, and wire muzzles go on easier than nylon because non-fabric muzzles maintain their shape. Leather muzzles are fastened by buckles which are relatively slow to fasten. Cloth (fabric) muzzles are often fastened by a belt snap which are faster than buckles but cause a snap noise near the dog's ear when fastened.

Muzzles should be cleaned, and if possible sanitized, prior to each use. Plastic, nylon, and wire muzzles can be sanitized with common disinfectants. Leather muzzles cannot be easily sanitized. Untreated leather muzzles are porous and can trap microorganisms. Leather will also dry out and crack. Therefore, before their first use, leather muzzles should be treated with linseed or similar oil for leather treatment, dried, and then rubbed with a beeswax for leather treatment. This treatment will inhibit absorption of microorganisms and permit rinsing and drying between each application of the muzzle. Regular retreatment of the leather with oil and wax is based on the frequency of use of the muzzle, but four times per year should be the minimum. A properly maintained leather muzzle will also become more pliable and comfortable for the animal.

Tractable dogs or dogs that have been trained to accept a muzzle can be muzzled by one person with a commercial muzzle from behind. The muzzle straps are held in each hand with the muzzle below the dog's throat. The muzzle is then quickly and smoothly brought up and over the dog's muzzle. Approaching the dog from directly in front of its nose with a muzzle will cause most dogs to resist.

If the dog is not trained to accept a muzzle, commercial muzzles are best applied by two handlers. One handler should have the dog restrained in the sitting position or in sternal recumbency. The other handler approaches from the side or behind. Holding the straps on each side of the dog's head and with the muzzle cuff below the dog's mouth, the cuff should be brought up in smooth, rapid swooping motion over the muzzle and then pulled back. The straps are fastened behind the head, below the ears. Putting treats in a muzzle to encourage acceptance can be dangerous to handlers holding the muzzle in a manner to invite exploration, dangerous to the dog that may inhale the treat, and unsanitary, unless the muzzle is thoroughly cleaned and sanitized between each use.

Another muzzle application method involves one handler holding the dog's head from behind with the handler's thumbs behind the dog's ears, palms restraining side movement of the neck, and index and middle fingers beneath the jaws to keep the jaw from being lowered. If necessary, the hands may be partially protected by leather gloves or a towel. The other handler stands beside the dog and slips the muzzle over the dog and fastens it.

Gauze Muzzles

Non-stretch, two inch gauze can be used as a convenient, effective, inexpensive, and sanitary temporary muzzle. The advantages of gauze muzzles are that they are portable, disposable, inexpensive, soft and noninjurious, and fits all size dogs. A roll of gauze can easily be carried in a pocket and is sanitary since after a portion is used as a muzzle, the portion can be discarded. Stretchy gauze is not a safe restraint for the handler and should not be used.

Disadvantages include more skill is required to apply a gauze muzzle and application is slower than with commercial muzzles. Since gauze muzzles hold the mouth closed in the same manner as commercial open-ended muzzles, gauze muzzles also have the same disadvantages as open-ended muzzles (inability to pant or drink). They can be inappropriately applied so tightly by unskilled handlers that they cause pain and injure the skin around the muzzle.

Safer application of a gauze muzzle require two handlers. One handler restrains the neck and jaw from behind with a two hand head restraint hold (both hands on the neck, fingers below the jaw, and thumbs behind the ears.) While gripping the head, the handler presses down on the dog's neck and shoulders with wrists and forearms to make it more difficult for the dog to lift a front leg and rake the facial area. The other handler, the one applying the muzzle, stands in front of the dog.

When preparing to apply a gauze muzzle, the length of gauze needed is the length of the handler's arms spread wide apart (about 5 ft) for small- and medium-sized dogs and twice that distance for large dogs. More than enough length should be chosen because if the length is too short to tie and the effort is aborted, the dog will be taught that escape is possible. The handler's hand should not ever get closer than 6 inches to the dog's muzzle while applying the loops and pulling the ties down. The first loop is made with a double overhand knot, put over the muzzle, and pulled down firmly with a knot on top of muzzle. The double overhand knot will spread out the loop making it easier to get over the muzzle and when pulled down, and it will hold its place better while the second knot is readied. Another loop is quickly made above the dog's nose with a simple overhand knot, flipped under the muzzle, and pulled down below the dog's lower jaw. An overhand knot is then made behind head and under ears, and tied with a slip knot (a bow knot).

Short nosed dogs, such as boxers, may have their nostrils collapsed by gauze muzzles, so the top tie on the muzzle is not pulled tight. After the tie behind the head, one end of the gauze is placed under the top muzzle tie. The final tie is made on top of the dog's head to keep the gauze from being too far down on the dog's muzzle.

To remove a gauze muzzle, handler's hands should not get closer than 6 inches from the dog's mouth. The head should be restrained by one handler from behind while the other handler unties the slip knot and then quickly pulls the muzzle in a straight line parallel to the dog's muzzle. The conical shape of a dog's jaws allow the gauze to pull off easily without risking being bitten trying to loosen the ties first.

Makeshift Muzzles

Emergency makeshift muzzles can be created from ties, shoelaces, cords, or long strips of any cloth.

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

- Before any dog is removed from a cage or run, it should have a slip leash applied
- So-called choke collars are intended for choking a dog. It is to gather the dog's attention on the handler.
- Overuse, or other inappropriate use, of a muzzle can make a dog more fearful of being handled.

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.