

Introducing your puppy to a lead and harness

The use of harnesses is often preferable to walking a dog on their collar for a number of reasons:

- Health concerns related to pulling into a collar
<https://animal-learn.de/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/HalsbandBrustgeschirr-freedogzE.pdf>
- When young, puppies need to learn about and explore the world around them, being restrained on a collar can cause tension and discomfort which can be detrimental to their first impressions of new situations/ people and other dogs. Any equipment that is designed to cause discomfort to stop pulling shouldn't be used as this can lead to behavioural difficulties further down the line e.g. collars that tighten.
- Some may argue that a puppy or dog wouldn't pull into a collar if it was uncomfortable for them, however puppies are not born understanding the concept of leads and collars so need to learn about these. They may pull into a collar and not understand that if they no longer pull, then the discomfort is released on their neck. This results in a dog that consistently pulls into their collar and can be heard rasping / struggling to breathe.
- Training that involves yanking a dog on the neck to teach them not to pull is not advised, dogs do not learn well this way and time is better spent teaching them how to walk on a lead with positive reward-based training. Dogs that have learnt not to pull on a lead via the yanking method often display nervous body postures, are less confident in their environment and may be more reactive.

Harness and lead options

Harnesses should be non-tightening and not impede natural movement e.g. should not restrict their shoulders. Generally, the 'Y' shaped front piece harnesses are likely to provide enough shoulder movement and sit comfortably on your dog.

Some harness options: Dog Games Perfect Fit, Speak Dog harnesses Swindon, Rough Wear front range, TrueLove double clip harness.

Ideally puppies should go for a walk in a correctly fitting harness rather than on the collar to avoid injuries to the neck etc and a long, lightweight lead to ensure walks are a comfortable and thus a positive experience.

The above harnesses have a ring on the back and on the chest, they can therefore be used with a double clip lead such as a Halti lead that can give you greater control and improve walking in balance for dogs that pull a lot on the lead.



Socialising

Puppies need to have positive experiences with the world around them to ensure they grow up to be calm and confident adult dogs, a harness and lead should be used in a way to support this safely and not to physically move a puppy in a situation. Keep the lead loose where safe to do so to give your puppy the choice of whether to approach something novel.

Introducing walks

Introduce the lead and harness slowly in short sessions (1 minute or so), practice in the house and garden first before taking your puppy out for their first walk. You can practice dropping a treat on the floor next to the side of your foot each step you take to start with, then building up to every few steps etc.

Don't get too bogged down with completing a certain route as it's normal for pups to need to stop and watch the world go by and take a long time to process their environment. They may pull on the lead to get back to their safe space – your home.

Keep your lead soft/slack and go with your puppy (where safe to do so) so they can explore but don't learn that pulling on their lead gets them places. If your puppy is nervous however and pulls on the lead to move away from something, again go with them and let them move away.

Take plenty of treats and a toy with you to engage them with if needed e.g. after a scary incident, if biting their lead etc.



Teaching your dog to wear a harness

Teaching a dog to offer a 'head in' to their harness, gives them the choice of having his harness put on for a walk. This works well for over the head type harnesses.

Some dogs can be really unsure and can avoid having their harness put on but there are things that can help:

- Starting again with a completely new harness to change the association, new harness appears so does cheese! Place the harness on the floor, as your dog approaches for a sniff say 'Yes' and roll a treat away from the harness. Repeat until dog is confident and has understood approaching equals treat. Tip - don't lure them closer to the harness with food, then by rolling the treat away this gives them the option to re-approach the harness.
- Progress to holding the harness to one side of you and repeating above. Tip - don't move the harness towards the dog, keep it still. Repeat until the dog is confident approaching the harness in your hands.
- At this point you can use a treat to lure the dog's head through the harness hole, reward and then immediately roll another treat behind them so they take their head back out of the harness to go and eat the treat. Tip- don't put the harness on at this stage, repeat until the dog is putting their head in without the treat lure.
- Progress to slowly being able to clip the harness together. If your dog moves away, go back to teaching the head in as above. Have a favourite toy ready (ideally a new one) to have a short game with your dog as it gets them moving about in their harness. Take it off after a few seconds. Build up the time wearing the harness slowly.
- Once your dog is comfortable with the above, start to pair the harness going on with a high value chew/stuffed Kong so that actually the harness going on is not only a good thing but is also associated with calm settled behaviour.

A similar process can be used to the one above for 'step in' harnesses.

🌟 No more legging it after your dog trying to get their harness on and great teamwork 🌟