

Desensitizing for Gentle Leaders

Best Paw Forward Inc., 407-321-1006, 1835 Oak Haven Plantation Rd., Osteen FL 32764-8872
bestpaw.com bestpaw@iag.net

All copyright privileges reserved to Best Paw Forward Inc. 4/22/02 © Revised 4/3/2009

- ❖ Is your dog strong enough to make you move to stay upright?
- ❖ Does your dog pull hard enough to choke himself on a flat buckle or snap collar?
- ❖ Is your dog confused about whether dogs or people are supposed to be household leaders?
- ❖ If the answer to any of these is “Yes,” your dog is a good candidate for a Gentle Leader.

Step 1 -- Getting used to the nose loop – 10-20 times a day for 1-2 days, depending on your dog. Practice “getting dressed.” Have your dog put his nose through just the nose loop to get a cookie, then remove the nose loop and tell your pet to “go play.”

Step 2 -- Getting used to the nose loop and the head collar – 1-2 days, depending on your dog. Some dogs can be practicing this on the same days as getting used to the nose loop. Have the dog “get dressed” still using the cookie to get his nose through the nose loop. Now buckle or fasten the head collar. Click then treat. Remove the collar; tell the dog to go play. Do 10-20 times per day. If you have a heavily-coated dog and are using a Gentle Leader which has a snap, place a handkerchief or napkin over the dog’s hair under the hook to more easily fasten the ends.

Step 3 -- Getting the dog used to wearing the Gentle Leader at mealtime – 2-3 days. At mealtime, have the dog get dressed and hold on to your leash attached to his Gentle Leader; click then treat. Give the dog his food. Take the Gentle Leader off immediately when the dog is finished eating. (Gentle Leaders make expensive chew toys when left on unsupervised dogs.)

Step 4 -- Wearing the Gentle Leader for walks – 5 short walks. When you take the dog on a walk have the dog “get dressed” – continue to click and treat. Connect the leash to his regular collar.

Step 5 -- Hooking up the Gentle Leader for walks. When you take the dog for a short walk, have the dog “get dressed.” Continue to click and treat. Connect the leash to the Gentle Leader. If he resists the Gentle Leader a lot and is thrashing about, go back to the first step and increase the time and the value of the treats at each level.

The fit is important. You should keep the collar very snug at the top of the neck so it doesn't slide around, and the nose loop must be adjusted every time the collar fit is adjusted. The nose loop should be a little looser than the collar.

While training your dog on a Gentle Leader, leave the regular collar and tags on the dog.

While the Gentle Leader is a great training tool you still have to teach your dog not to pull. It provides power steering so you get lots of chances to reward your dog for putting slackness into the leash, for creating a loose lead.

There is a natural instinct to resist pressure (called opposition reflex) which encourages a dog to pull against a tight lead. The pressure from the Gentle Leader comes from behind the head so many dogs tend to slow down, and from gentle pressure against the nose like a halter on a horse. It turns your dog's head when he starts to pull out in front of you. Where the head goes, the body will follow.

If your dog continues to pull into the head collar, then he should walk at your side or slightly behind you, never in front of you until he accepts your confident control of the walk.

Gradually increase the distance of the dog's walks. Frequent short walks are better for training purposes than less-frequent long walks. Or you can practice in the house or on the patio first.

Some dogs may learn to like the Gentle Leader better if you put it on each time the dog comes out of the crate for a few minutes or if you put it on for a few minutes before every pleasurable activity in which he is allowed to engage.

Hold onto the leash which you will attach to the Gentle Leader to ensure that your dog does not rub his face on the ground or flooring. Keep the leash short enough to stop him from scratching his face with his nails as he adjusts to the new feeling of the Gentle Leader.

You may also wash your Gentle Leader to remove the fabric sizing and make it feel softer on your dog's face.

Even with a Gentle Leader, children should not walk dogs alone, for their safety and for their dogs' safety as well. Let them practice indoors or within a fenced outdoor area. If a young child is participating in the training, he should share the hold on the lead with an adult at all times when outdoors outside of a fence.

Never let your dog wander around the house or yard with a Gentle Leader on unless you are walking the dog on a leash. While it is a bargain as a training aid, it is an expensive choice as a doggie chew toy.