

Training your kennel dogs to wear collars and a lead

A slip lead is a common tool for moving dogs around in kennels, veterinary hospitals, and animal shelters. However, they aren't especially practical for taking dogs on walks or other places that dogs may go with their new owners. Training your dogs to accept wearing a collar with a lead attached is a great skill that can follow them into a new home. You may find it useful in your kennel as well! Here's how to do it!

Getting started: Introducing the collar

Introduce your dog to the concept of wearing a collar slowly. Hold the ends of the collar into a loose loop, and use treats to lure your dog's muzzle toward and then through the loop. When they do, be sure to praise and give them treats. It is important not to rush this step: Your dog should be happy to place their head through the loop on their own before moving to the next step.



Next: Practice placing it on your dog

Get your dog used to the sensation of the collar touching their neck. Adjust the length of the collar and slowly place it around your dog's neck AS IF you were going to clip it but DO NOT clip it yet! Give your dog treats throughout this step. When they are comfortable with this step, you can move on.

Next: Getting used to clipping

Make sure the collar is adjusted to fit your dog. You should just be able to fit two fingers under the collar when attached. Attach the collar and give your dog a treat. Unclip the collar after just five seconds.



Next: Build up duration of wearing the collar

You will gradually increase the time your dog is wearing the collar, building up to minutes at a time, then longer periods. You can give your dog treats, play with them, or engage in other activities they enjoy while they wear the collar. This will help distract them as they get used to wearing the collar.



For puppies

The process of getting puppies to wear collars is similar, but often they will get used to the collar and lead a little faster than adults do.

You can start teaching puppies to wear a collar at 6 weeks of age. If you are holding back any puppies for breeding purposes, be sure to continue this training up until at least 16 weeks of age. Maintain the habit of walking them on a collar and lead at least monthly so pups stay used to it as adults. This is faster and more effective than introducing a collar and lead just prior to rehoming dogs at the end of their career.

Adding the lead

We recommend a 6-foot-long nylon or leather lead. The best time to do this is before a meal. Attach it to the clip on your dog's collar and let it drop on the ground. This is a great time to scatter some treats on the ground. Let your dog eat them with the lead attached. When they are done eating the treats, remove the lead.

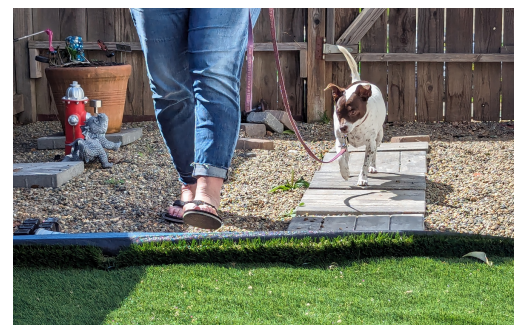
*If you do not free-feed your dogs, you can also use mealtimes for this purpose!

Add the human

Repeat the previous step, while gently holding onto the lead. You can also toss some treats on the floor by your dog and hold the lead gently while they eat them. When they are done eating, remove the lead.

Add gentle pressure

Encourage your dog to walk with you with the lead on. Start off in a space that your dog is comfortable and not distracted, and keep the walks short. You can also toss treats a little further away and hold on to the lead while your dog walks to get the treats. Do not pull on the lead – any pressure should be gentle. If your dog enjoys being outside, this is a good opportunity to practice walking with them.



Trouble-shooting

- Try to maintain some slack in the lead when walking.
- If your dog pulls on the lead, it's best to hold still.
- Have treats handy so you can lure your dog back to you.
- Harnesses are designed to be more comfortable for most dogs and can prevent pulling.
- If your dog continues to pull, a well-fitted harness may be a better option! You can teach dogs to wear a harness in a similar way.
- If your dog freezes, tries to escape, tries to bite, or otherwise seems stressed out, stop and ask your attending veterinarian for help on how to best proceed.