

In-House Behavior Modification Protocol

Desensitizing to the Gentle Leader

Protocol used to desensitize a dog to wear a Gentle Leader head halter needed to modify on-leash reactivity

Step 1

Holding the nose loop open with one hand – with the other hold a treat through the loop so that the dog approaches and takes the treat out of your hand. Repeat this step until the dog is comfortable approaching for the treat.

Step 2

Holding the nose loop open with one hand, encourage the dog to put his nose through the open loop to get a treat that you are holding with the other hand. Do this 4-5 times each session and do as many sessions each day as you can. Do these sessions until the dog readily and happily sticks his nose into the loop for the treat.

Step 3

Once the dog will happily put his nose into the loop – start to let go of the loop so that it is resting on the top of his muzzle while you feed the dog a couple of treats. Then take it off and stop giving the treats. Repeat this 4-5 times during each session and do as many sessions as you can in a day.

Step 4

Once the dog puts his nose in the loop and accepts the feel of the loop resting on the top of his muzzle, it's time to fasten the neck strap. Have the dog stick his nose through the nose loop, let the loop rest on his muzzle as in step 2, give him a couple of treats and while he is eating the treats, reach around and fasten the neck strap. Then give him a couple more treats and take it off and walk away until the next session. Do this over and over until the dog is comfortable with having you put the Gentle Leader on.

Step 5

Put the gentle leader on and hold a spoon filled with peanut butter or wet dog or cat food in front of his face so that he licks the spoon while wearing the Gentle Leader. Do this over and over until the dog is comfortable with having the Gentle Leader on for the length of time it takes to lick all the pasty food off the spoon.

Step 6

Put the gentle leader on and have the dog start to move around. Toss a ball or a treat so he runs to get it – something fun. During this step we are conditioning the dog to the feel of the head-collar while he is moving about.

Step 7

Put the Gentle Leader on and attach the leash to the ring on the bottom of the nose loop and walk him around. This is to get him used to the extra weight on top of his muzzle from the leash and clip. Give plenty of treats while walking.

Step 8

Start to use the Gentle Leader on walks (another positive activity) in addition to continuing to do Steps 6 & 7 daily.

At this point you are ready to use the Gentle Leader head-collar for the behavior modification program. If you do not go through this process, the dog may never accept the head-collar and then it won't be a useful tool to modify his behavior. Once he is fine having the collar on, the extra pressure applied when you pull gently up on the leash to suppress reactive behavior will have more of an impact. So take the time to do this properly.