

Muzzles: Short-Term Only

Written by Janet Goodman, BT Contributor
July 2016

Certain pet supplies need warning labels



NO BARK - NO BITE COMFORT MUZZLE

Years ago a prospective training customer walked up to my facility with her beagle in tow. I was shocked by what I saw: The beagle had disfiguring scars all around its snout. The owner explained away the injuries, and I'll never forget how sickened I was by her story.

It turned out that the dog had a barking issue; as a solution to the problem, this awful woman chose to close the dog's mouth with duct tape. As if that weren't bad enough, she then proceeded to forget about her bound-up pet and by the next day, the dog had frantically clawed and clawed at its face in a failed attempt to free itself.

The use of duct tape in this manner was certainly a criminal act, but the dog would have reacted in the same way had this owner used a perfectly legal muzzle, instead of tape.

It would be a smart idea for all muzzles to be sold with bright-red warning labels attached and

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marked: *For short-term and supervised use only while handling aggressive dogs. This product should not be worn to prevent chewing and barking* .

For years these products have been misused and misunderstood by dog owners.

Muzzles should be designed for one purpose only: to safely and *temporarily* prevent biting. Veterinary clinics and grooming salons use them in order to handle and care for aggressive pets. Trainers use them to handle biters safely while doing obedience or behavior-modification techniques. Here is a list of what muzzles are not:

- They are not training tools that make dogs less aggressive.
- They are not training tools to teach dogs not to bark or chew things.
- They are not to be used as punishment.
- They are not to be used unless dogs are supervised.
- They are not to be used for extended periods of time.

I never really understood why people think muzzles are good training tools to stop barking and chewing behavior -- until I noticed that muzzle manufacturers themselves advertise this about their products. This is misguided advice.

A dog wearing an open-nose muzzle all day long could easily collapse from heat exhaustion due to its inability to pant -- not to mention its lack of water intake. And a dog unaccustomed to wearing any style of muzzle can also injure itself by trying to remove it, as did that beagle.

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Yet it's not only manufacturers who are encouraging these alternative uses. Some nationally known trainers also advise dog owners to use basket-style muzzles for all-day, unsupervised use in order to prevent barking and chewing.

Most muzzles sold in retail stores are designed for long-snouted canines. Muzzles designed for flat-faced or short-snouted dogs like boxers and pugs can be purchased through pet supply catalogues and online.

Basically, there are two styles of muzzles: the open-nose style made of nylon or leather fabric and the basket-style that completely encases the snout, made of plastic, leather, nylon, or metal. The latter can be seen worn by greyhounds at the racetrack.

The open-nose style is inexpensive, but it prevents the dog from panting and could cause overheating. It's only meant to be used briefly while visiting the vet or groomer. Whenever I take my terrier mix Queenie to the vet, I slip on one of these open-nose muzzles in the examination room to keep vet and techs safe.

The basket-style muzzle is safest for dog and handler. It allows panting as well as drinking and eating; the sturdy construction and complete coverage best prevents biting. Extra tie-downs keep this muzzle in place if a dog tries to pry it off. Of course, no muzzle should be used unsupervised.

Muzzles alone can't change a dog's aggressive behavior. That can only be achieved through behavior modification. The muzzle prevents a trainer from getting bitten during the training session while safely rewarding good behavior.

It can't be said enough: muzzles should only be used when handling aggressive dogs.

Training collars are other types of pet supplies that need instruction in proper handling. Metal choke chains and pinch collars are not all-day types of restraints, like nylon or leather collars

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that carry dog identification and rabies tags. Training collars should only be used while dogs are on the leash with their owners. Unsupervised, dogs wearing them have been known to get caught up on doorknobs, cages, and even other dogs' teeth and jaws. Canine escape artists have hanged themselves with choke collars going over or under fencing.

Retractable leashes also need to be used with caution (see “ [Regrettable Retractable](#) ,” March 2015). Unlike muzzle products, these often do come with instructions for safe and proper handling; still, many owners and their pets suffer injuries each year from the flesh-slicing cords.

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