



Harness

Harnesses

A harness is a very useful safety tool which will help you control your dog by guiding their chest; they can be used in conjunction with a head halter to have full control over the direction your dog moves.

There are numerous types of harnesses available, it can be trial and error to find which one fits your dog without restricting their movement.

Regardless of which brand you use; ensure you get the correct size and fit; most companies which produce harness's offer a sizing guide.



Harness Training Sessions

Ensure you met your dogs needs and set them up to succeed before starting the training session.

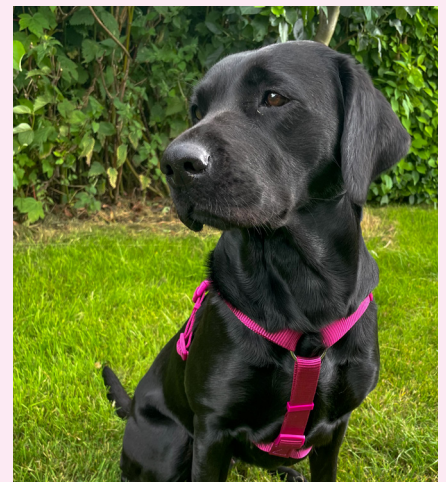
Each session should be 5 - 10 minutes long; the session should stop after 10 minutes, regardless of the amount of progress made. It is possible to do two sessions, however, there should be a 10 - 15 minute break between sessions where your dog is removed from the training environment and given the opportunity to rest. The sessions can be carried out every day.

Prepare enough small tasty treats to last for the whole 5 - 10 minute session and have them to hand in a treat pouch or pocket. Soft food such as peanut butter, cream cheese, pâté or wet dog food on a wooden spoon or lick mat are useful to have to hand.

NB - if using peanut butter ensure it does not contain any artificial sweeteners, especially Xylitol as these are toxic for dogs.

Before you start training your dog to wear your chosen harness, you will need to ensure you know how the harness is correctly put on and removed; most manufacturers will have a written guide or video detailing how to correctly fit their harness.

This handout is based on a using a "H style" harness.





Harness

Stage 1 - Introducing the Harness

1. Choose a cue word to use such as "Harness" which will indicate that the harness is going to be used.
2. Have some small tasty treats to hand which your dog will work for.
3. Sit with your dog and say the cue word, show them the harness and give them a treat. Do not attempt to put it on, just show it to them.
4. Repeat this 15-20 times within a few minutes. During this time do not expect any specific behaviour, such as "Sit" or "Down", just show them the harness, say the cue word and give them a treat
5. After 15 – 20 repetitions your dog should start forming an association between seeing the harness and getting a treat.
6. Say the cue word, then place the harness on the floor with some treats near it. Over time move the treats closer to the harness and eventually in the loops of the harness so that your dog gets used to touching the harness with their nose. Once they are comfortable approaching and touching the harness, progress onto the next step.
7. Hold the harness by the strip which will sit along their back, with the chest strap undone and, in a position, so your dog can get their nose into the neck loop;
8. Slowly move the treat closer to the neck loop so that your dog has to put their nose through the neck loop to get the treat; as they approach say the cue word and allow them to take the treat. Do not push it over their head or try to do it up at this point; allow your dog to approach, put their nose through the loop and move away in their own time.
9. Repeat this several times, slowly moving the food closer to you and further through the nose loop so that your dog has to put their nose further into the nose loop each time.
10. Test your dog; hold the harness and say the cue word, they should approach the harness and put their nose through the neck loop. If they do not do this, go back and work through steps 8 and 9 until they can respond to the cue word.



Place treats into the loops of the harness.

Once your dog is able to put their nose in the nose loop on cue, you can move onto the next stage.



Harness

Stage 2 - Getting used to the noise of the clip/s

This stage is going to get your dog used to the noise of the clip/s on the harness.

1. Have some small tasty treats and soft food to hand which your dog will work for.
2. Hold the harness where your dog can see it, do up the clip and reward them.
3. Sit them. Repeat this until they are looking for a treat when they hear the harness being done up.
4. Hold the harness in a way that your dog can get their head through the neck loop, say the cue word, once they have their head through the neck loop, give them a treat. Keep giving them treats or allow them to lick some soft food while you slowly move the chest straps; DO NOT try and do it up yet, just get the dog used to the straps being moved around their chest while they have the neck loop is on.
5. Over several repetitions of Step 5, slowly move the straps more until you can hold them in the correct position for a few seconds while they are receiving treats or licking at soft food.
6. Always release the chest straps before they finish the food so that they do not try to pull away from the harness.



Hold the harness and do up the clip. Reward them with a treat.

Once you can hold the chest straps in position for a few seconds you can move on to Stage 3.



Harness

Stage 3 - Fastening the chest strap and increasing the time wearing the harness

The most important aspect of Stage 3 is to take your time – do not rush this stage as it could undo all of the harness training done so far.

1. Have some small tasty treats and soft food to hand which your dog will work for.
2. Have some soft food ready your dog can lick, say the cue word and while your dog is licking the treat with the neck loop on, slowly move the chest straps and do them clip up. After 1 second, undo it and take it off. Repeat this several times until your dog is comfortable with the harness being done up.
3. Slowly increase the time the clip is done up; this may be in 1 second increments until they are comfortable wearing it for a few minutes at a time.
4. At this early stage, keep feeding treats through the while the harness is done up. Over time, you can decrease the number of treats given.
5. Then your dog is comfortable wearing the harness, try scattering some treats on the floor to encourage him to move around with the harness on.



Slowly increase the time the harness clip is done up until they are comfortable wearing it.

Once your dog is comfortable in the harness you can move on to stage 4.

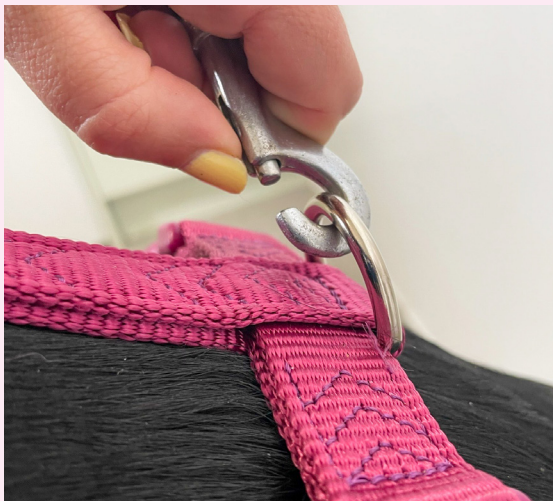


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Stage 4 - Attach the leash

Once your dog can wear the harness and move around comfortably, the leash can be attached to the harness;

1. Have some small tasty treats and soft food to hand which your dog will work for.
2. Put the harness on your dog.
3. Clip the leash on for a few seconds, give them some treats while it is attached, then remove it. DO NOT move or pull on the leash, this step allows them to get used to the feeling of the leash attached to the harness.
4. Gradually increase the length of time the leash is attached to the harness; always reward them for being comfortable in the harness.
5. Once they are comfortable with the leash attached to the harness, you can progress to holding the leash while it is attached to the harness.
6. Once they are comfortable wearing the harness with the leash attached you can move onto training them to loose leash walk while wearing it.



Clip the leash on for a few seconds and then remove it, then gradually increase the time it is attached.



Once they are comfortable wearing the harness with the leash attached, you can move onto loose leash walking.

Taken from Small Animal Veterinary Psychiatry. S. Denenberg, CABI Publication, 2021