

HUMANE SOCIETY OFF BROWARD COUNTY

Behavior Modification Handout



Training and Exercise Equipment for Your Dog

Training your dog can be fun and a great way to bond with your companion and having the right equipment can make the experience less stressful for both you and your pet. Safety and comfort are key ingredients for the basics such as a collar, harness and leash. You want something you are comfortable with but also something your dog is going to be happy wearing. A good fit is important when choosing your training equipment. If it is too big this will put your dog at risk of slipping out of their collar or harness and getting into a dangerous situation. Have fun picking out your favorite color or pattern and get busy training your dog!

Starting Off On the Right Paw

Shopping is part of the fun of picking out what your pet will be wearing this summer! Keep it simple and keep safety in mind. The right equipment will help to keep your pet safe and secure while walking and training him. The most common problem with collars and harnesses is that they do not fit well or they are not designed to be used for a high level of physical activity such as walking for exercise or training. Buckle collars are among the most widely misused pieces of equipment. A buckle collar is good for displaying identification (a name tag) or making a fashion statement but not great for walking your dog. These collars are hard to fit so that they do not slip off over your dog's head if he pulls or struggles. Sometimes dogs will become frightened in a new environment and they made try to back up or wiggle out of the collar or harness in an attempt to escape the scary thing. You always want your dog to be safely attached to you no matter what and having the right collar, harness and leash is a great place to start.

- Collar – A martingale collar is perfect for insuring your dog is safe and stays on leash. This is a limited slip collar that will slip over your dog's head and when properly fitted it will tighten slightly if your dog pulls. The martingale part of the collar will allow the collar to tighten just enough so it will not slip over your dog's head but still remain comfortable and not choke your dog unnecessarily.
- Harness- A front hook harness will work best to reduce pulling and give you the comfort and control you need. The design works by redirecting your dog's body weight back towards you. Where the front of the dog goes the body will follow. The sensation harness is a good choice and is widely available. It is easy to get on and when fitted properly should be snug and not able to move or slip around the dog's chest. You may have to readjust the harness from day to day to ensure it stays adjusted correctly.
- Leash – A six-foot nylon or leather leash works best for walking and training your dog. Nylon or leather leash will be comfortable for you and your pet. Chain leash are heavy and can be scary if they make a lot of noise and they are not recommended for normal daily use. Six – fee will give you the perfect length to safely hold the leash in both hands and give you the control you need.

Avoiding the Pitfalls

Not all equipment is created equal! Do your research when purchasing and consider all your options but try and keep it simple. The easier it is to use the more likely you are to actually use it. Some equipment options to avoid that are still being used as common practice can be detrimental or even dangerous for your pet.

- Choke, Prong or Pinch Collars – These collars are designed to cause discomfort to reduce pulling and it is an unnecessary evil to cause our pets' pain in order to achieve the behaviors we desire. Even large, strong dogs are capable of learning not to pull hard on the leash when walked and with the right equipment and a good training program you can teach your dog too.
- Shock or Electric Collars – These are also pain delivery systems. The shock is designed to punish your dog for an unwanted behavior. These collars have been studied extensively and have been found to cause an increase in aggression and defensive aggressive displays. Using pain as a training tool is just outdated and unnecessary in today's advanced science of training and behavior.
- Retractable Leashes – A leash should be sturdy and retractable leashes are notorious for breaking at the worst possible moment....when your dog has run to the end of the cord and is gaining speed and “snap” the cord breaks and your dog is loose and has a full head of running steam! These leashes also will tend to give your dog too much length with little control and you may find your dog gets easily tangled up in his environment. Entanglements can cause fear and accidents may happen. If you want to be able to give your dog extra room to run around in a safe space while still on leash you should use a training lead. These can be purchased in various lengths and sizes and offer a safer alternative to retractable leashes.

Tips and Hints

- Size does matter! Find the right fit for your pet for the best results.
- Keep it simple! If it is hard to get on your pet and has a dozen different clips and buckles you are more likely to not use it.
- Invest in good quality! Your pet's safety is not where you want to skimp.
- Be familiar with your gear! The more you know about how it works the better it will work for you.
- Have fun picking out the perfect collar, leash or harness for your dog and don't be afraid to customize!
- Remember to always use studied and proven training methods that are reward based!