

## Introducing a harness

Walking your dog in a harness is a useful way of reducing the risk of neck injury, maximizing comfort and making walkies more enjoyable for everyone! The harness itself will not stop your dog wanting to pull ahead when you're out and about, so you'll need to teach them to walk along next to you on a loose-lead just the same as you would if you were attaching the lead to his collar.

We have no way of explaining to our dogs all the benefits they will gain from wearing a harness, so dogs can sometimes become a little unsure about having a harness put on for the first time – imagine someone forcing a jumper straight over your head without any explanation! A dog who hasn't been given the opportunity to learn to wear a harness happily might therefore become afraid of them, shying away or completely avoiding you when he sees you approaching with the harness.

Taking the time to introduce your dog's harness in a kind, gentle and fun way is likely to save you both a lot of stress in the long-term, as your dog will learn to really enjoy wearing their harness and enjoy you putting it on them!

### 10 steps to happy harnessing!

Remember, patience is key when introducing new equipment as you are making a life-long investment in your dog's happiness!



Step 1



Step 2

🐾 **Step 1:** Leave the harness on the ground with some treats sprinkled around it – allow your dog to sniff and investigate it.

🐾 **Step 2:** After a few days of leaving it on the ground with treats you can lift it and feed your dog treats by placing your hand right through the opening.

🐾 **Step 3:** You can now move your hand a little further back, so your dog has to move their nose and mouth right through the opening in order to get their treats.



Step 3



Step 4

🐾 **Step 4:** If your dog isn't showing any signs of worry about this then you can keep your hand on one side of the opening and encourage them to put their nose right through the opening in order to get their treats from your hand – if they retreat simply remove the harness straight away and feed them anyway.

- Step 5:** Once your dog is happily putting their head through the opening in order to get their treat, you can now let go of the harness and let it gently hang around their neck while you continue to feed them treats – if they back away or appear worried simply remove it straight away and continue to feed them.



Step 5



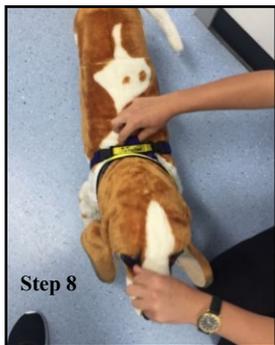
Step 6

- Step 6:** You can now try closing one of the clasps while you are just holding the harness next to your dog - this will prepare them for the sound of the clasp closing well before you have to do this while they are wearing the harness, when the noise will happen behind their head.

- Step 7:** Once your dog is happy with Steps 5 and 6 you can now attempt to fasten one of the clasps over their back – always give them treats while they are learning that this is the next stage.



Step 7



Step 8

- Step 8:** You can now fasten any other clasps your harness might have – remember this noise might be a little frightening so keep the treats coming to your dog so they learn to enjoy the sound as it means they always gets a treat!

- Step 9:** If your dog isn't showing any signs of distress then you can play a game with their favourite toy or do some fun trick training for their favourite treats to get them used to moving around in their harness.



Step 9



Step 10

- Step 10:** Take your dog for a walk with their harness on, giving them treats for walking while wearing it – hopefully your dog will not have difficulties wearing their harness at this point, however if they do then simply go back to the step at which your dog was most comfortable and try again from that stage, building up their confidence gradually.

Signs of fear or anxiety can be as simple as licking lips, moving away, yawning and showing the whites of their eyes but can also escalate to freezing, growling or, if your dog becomes very frightened, even biting. If you see any of these signs stop! Our **Body Language** handout provides information on learning to recognise how your dog is feeling and how to respond appropriately. Whenever you see any signs that your dog might be worried or frightened, go back to a stage at which they were confident. Always respond to your dog's signals so that they know they can trust you to understand what they are communicating and help them out!

**If your dog is showing any signs of aggression, or behaving in any way that worries you, please contact your vet to rule out a painful or medical reason for this. Your vet can then refer you to a qualified behaviourist to help you further.**

These resources have been created by Dogs Trust using the most up-to-date scientific-based understanding of dog behaviour and welfare needs and can be freely downloaded by anyone interested in learning more about understanding dog behaviour and training dogs.



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