



By Jessica Benoit RVT, VTS (Behavior), KPA CTP, CPDT-KA, EFFCP

Teaching Your Puppy to Love Their Leash Equipment

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Walking is an activity that you look forward to when bringing home your new puppy. When taking your puppy out for a leash walks, equipment such as a collar, harness, and leash are needed. Your puppy should feel comfortable wearing these items to ensure successful future walks. Before placing this equipment on for the first time, it must slowly be introduced. By pairing the sight of the collar and leash with food, your puppy should quickly form positive associations. The presence of the equipment will predict tasty treats, creating a positive emotional response to the leash and collar.

Items You Will Need

- Equipment for the session (leash, collar, and harness)
- Treats
- Clicker or verbal marker “yes”

Guidelines for Conditioning Your Puppy to Their Equipment

- Go slowly. The goal is to teach your puppy that the walking gear predicts tasty treats.
- Timing is everything. Present the leash and collar first, followed by treats. When the equipment disappears, then so do the treats.
- Never put a collar or harness on without first conditioning your puppy.
- If they are displaying any signs of stress, stop and go back to the last successful step which did not produce a fearful response.

Body Language That Can Indicate Stress

- Panting
- Lip licking
- Looking away
- Moving away (pulling head back)
- Tucked tail

- Ears back
- Walking away
- Yawning
- Scratching at their harness or collar once it is on

Training sessions should be one to two minutes. Progress at the puppy's pace and only present one piece of equipment at a time. If your puppy begins to use the piece of equipment as a chew toy, redirect the puppy by tossing a treat.

Step 1: Place the harness on the ground in front of your puppy and sprinkle treats around the harness.




Photo Courtesy of Jessica Benoit RVT, VTS (Behavior), KPA CTP, CPDT-KA, EFFCP

Step 2: Once they are done eating, pick up the harness and put it behind your back. Then go back to step one.



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Repeat these steps until your puppy approaches and interacts with the harness willingly. You should see ears pointed forward, tail wagging loosely, and relaxed body language.

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