



Homeward Bound Golden Retriever Rescue

Golden Rule Training

Don't Grab My Collar Please!

Does your Dog react when you reach for his collar? If so, there are ways to desensitize him, and if you have not tried, be careful and read the following. Many rescued dogs many have certain sensitivities, it is a good practice to give the dog time to adjust to you and his new home before assuming you can grab his collar.

How Collar Sensitivity Starts

Usually, collar sensitivity is a result of mishandling. A dog owner may get upset with a dog for misbehaving and he or she will most likely grab the dog by the collar and roughly shove the dog inside a garage or basement. After repeating the scenario over and over the dog begins resenting being grabbed by the collar. Depending on the dog's temperament the consequences may range from escaping or cowering, to growling or snapping.

The circumstances however, do not always stem from being mishandled. At times, the dog may associated being taken by the collar with being put inside a crate or having the leashed snapped on and leaving the park. Therefore, pain or some other unpleasant consequences are at the root of the problem.

What to do

Teach your dog a recall cue! This is one of the most important things to teach your dog! Recall can be taught as a game; your dog knows, based on past experience, he knows something wonderful is going to happen to him when he gets to you, a yummy treat!

It is important to have control over your dog by holding his collar to prevent him from running again. The way to teach your dog to be a willing participant is to practice this routine in a safe environment with lots of treats. It is important to follow up your recall with a sit; then touch your dog's collar right before you deliver a treat to his mouth. With practice, your dog will associate the collar grab with yummy treats = all good things!

Training is the best way to keep your dog safe. We offer obedience classes at Homeward Bound, and there are many other places available if you live a distance from the ranch. The SPCA and Humane Society both have positive reinforcement classes available. If those are not an option, we recommend only positive reinforcement classes; these are classes without the use of old harsh techniques and dangerous equipment, such as choke chains and pinch collars.

Although your dog may behave reliably at home, it is important to practice for the unexpected. Think about joining a basic obedience class to practice these techniques with a trained professional. Classes are usually a good value, provide important socialization, and lots of fun for everyone. If your dog shows signs of aggressive behavior when you reach for his collar, be sure to consult a professional dog trainer before practicing any of these techniques.

How to Prevent Collar Sensitivity

It's easier to prevent collar sensitivity than treating the problem. It is important to prevent bad associations from forming. To prevent collar sensitivity from happening:

Do Not:

- Grab your dog by the collar to crate him
- Grab your dog by the collar to reprimand him
- Grab your dog by the collar to snap the leash on and stop his play session
- Grab your dog by the collar to drag him away from something

While this may sound like a long list of things not to do, truth is, there are several more positive ways to teach and correct a dog without making it associate collar grabs with something unpleasant.

Instead Do:

- Lure your dog inside the crate by tossing a treat inside, making it a good thing
- Use your voice to re-direct your dog; clap your hands, make a "kissy" noise
- Play with your dog after snapping the leash on instead of abruptly interrupting play, making it a positive experience
- Call your dog to you or show a treat to remove him from a situation; this is redirecting him in a positive way

How to Treat Collar Sensitivity

According to [Dog Star Daily](#), 20 percent of dog bites occur when an owner is attempting to take a dog by the scruff or collar. Luckily, there is some work you can do to undo the negative associations and start building positive ones.

For instance, if your dog mouths at your hands upon grabbing the collar, start by touching the collar slightly and giving a treat, then holding the collar slightly and giving a treat, then holding the collar and walking one step and giving a treat, then finally holding the collar and walking several steps. Another options is clicker training, this will work well too.

If repeated long enough, the dog will soon learn that great things happen when you hold the collar!

References:

Dog Star Daily: Handling and Gentling