



Grafton Dog Obedience Club Inc.

HARNESS, COLLAR OR HEAD HALTER?

What should your dog wear to training – a harness? collar? or head halter? Let's look at the options.

Harness. Buckling your dog up in a harness is a great way to keep your dog safe when travelling and may also be appropriate for taking your dog for a walk. A harness is also used when tracking with your dog. However, you have very little control over your dog's body position in a harness and it is virtually impossible to prevent your dog from making eye contact with another dog, plus your dog is easily able to adopt a threatening body posture when wearing a harness. This is a problem if a) your dog is reactive and/or behaves defensively around other dogs as your dog will be able to intimidate other dogs by eyeballing them or b) if your dog is very strong or boisterous as you will have difficulty managing your dog.

In short, you have the least amount of control over your dog when he/she is wearing a harness.

Collar. A collar is the most common way of leading your dog. Our club permits the use of flat collars (buckle on or clip on) or martingale collars (a webbing collar with an extra loop that tightens if your dog tries to slip out of the collar). We do not allow check/choke chain collars. When your dog is wearing a collar you have some control over your dog's body position but will have difficulty controlling your dog's head position if you need to prevent your dog from eyeballing another dog and your dog can still adopt a defensive posture when wearing a collar. If your dog is strong or boisterous you may still have difficulty managing him/her in a collar.

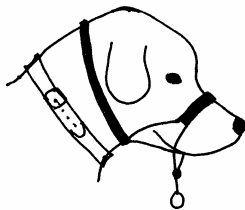
In short, a collar gives a fair degree of control over most dogs.

Head halter. Head halters are power steering for dogs. If your dog is strong, boisterous or has a tendency to be reactive and behave defensively around other dogs, a head halter will give you maximum control. A head halter is often also an excellent choice for very timid dogs as a head halter tends to have a calming effect on most dogs. A calm dog is also able to think more clearly – it is difficult to think clearly when either highly aroused (reactive/defensive) or very fearful. So a head halter may help with your training as your dog will be calmer and able to think more clearly whether your dog is strong and boisterous, reactive and defensive in the presence of other dogs, or if your dog is timid/fearful.



Grafton Dog Obedience Club Inc.

We stock two styles of head halter at training – both made by Black Dog. The most popular design, the Infin8, is excellent for dogs that are boisterous and for dogs that pull on the lead. The design is basically like a martingale collar with a band that wraps around the nose. When a dog pulls, this design exerts slight backward pressure on the nose that discourages pulling and has a calming effect (there are calming acupuncture points on the bridge of the nose directly underneath the position of the noseband). The Infin8 is easy to use, as your lead simply attaches to the collar part of the head halter in the usual way.



The other style of head halter, the traditional Black Dog design, has an attachment point beneath the dog's chin which allows you to easily turn the dog's head away from anything that causes the dog to become aroused or defensive and enables you to prevent your dog making eye contact with another dog. This style of head halter gives maximum control over your dog and over your dog's head and body position making it the best choice for dogs that are reactive and/or defensive. We recommend you use this style of head halter in conjunction with a normal collar and that you use the head turning action of the head

halter only when needed. The easiest way to do this is to use the head halter and collar in conjunction with a double ended lead, clipping the small, lightweight clip to the head halter (almost all dogs resent having a heavy clip on the head halter) and the bigger clip onto the normal collar.

In short, a head halter gives maximum control whether your dog is strong and boisterous, reactive and defensive or anxious and fearful. For further information on how to help dogs that are reactive, defensive, anxious or fearful, refer to the "Give Me Space" article in your work book.

In summary, we don't recommend training in a harness unless your dog has a health problem (such as a weak trachea that causes choking when wearing a collar) and ask that you bring your dog to training in a collar and/or head halter depending on how much help you need in managing your dog. If you are unsure what is the most appropriate equipment to use with your dog, talk to your instructor.

Carole Bryant©