

## **Collar Grabs**

There are several ways to get control of your dog. One common method is to grab the collar of the dog. But so many times, the dogs develop a negative association with this practice because they quickly figure out that the outcome is not in their favor. It can also be uncomfortable for the dog, or people can be too rough and yank. What typically follows a collar grab (going inside, end of play, etc.) is punishment for a dog. So often dogs will respond with a behavior; some choose avoidance, or moving away, or staying out of reach, while others might react with mouthing - a warning bite showing their displeasure.

It is beneficial to teach your dog positive associations with collar grabs so you can have this as an option for control, and so your dog sees this as a good thing. The process is detailed below.

### **Step 1 - Association**

Observe your dog, looking at body language (especially if you are working with an older dog). Subtle clues like lip licking, panting, pulling away, and turning the head are all subtle signs that your dog is uncomfortable, and you will need to go real slow with desensitizing your dog to the hold.

1. Have your food rewards ready. Prepare ahead of time without letting your dog see you do this.
2. Grab the collar and feed your dog the food.
3. If your dog has any negative response to the hold, grab and feed simultaneously, to begin with, and help change the association. ***Your grab will be subtle and gentle.***
4. Over time, build to a firm grab, followed by the food reward.
5. Do this sitting, standing, and move around the room practicing the grab and treat.

### **Step 2 - Duration**

Next, you will be building time with the grab so that your dog remains calm and comfortable while you are holding the collar.

1. Grab the collar and hold. Feed while you are holding the collar.
2. Then let go and feed again. That teaches your dog to remain there in front of you and not take off.
3. Begin with just a few seconds, but then gradually build time up (longer) and back down again (shorter).
4. Watch for subtle signs that your dog has any discomfort - turning the head away in avoidance, pulling away with the body, or leaning away from you. If you see this, go back to the first steps and work more there. Then very, very

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slow begin duration, starting with just two seconds, feeding simultaneously in the beginning.

5. Begin waiting to say your marker until your dog is giving you eye-contact. So grab, feed, when your dog gives you eye-contact, Mark and reward, let go of the collar, Mark, and reward when the dog gives you eye-contact. Release.

### **Putting it all together:**

1. Grab the collar and hold for a few seconds and wait for eye-contact, say your Reward Marker, and reward your dog.
2. Hold for a few more seconds, mark and reward again, and when your dog is giving you eye-contact.
3. Let go of the collar, mark your dog for remaining there in front of you, and giving eye-contact, reward again.
4. Release your dog, so he knows he is free to go. Toss food away from you.

### **Step 3 - Moving**

Now teach your dog to move with you and not resist while you are holding on to the collar.

1. Grab the collar, Mark, and reward when given eye-contact.
2. Take one step to apply just a little pressure. When your dog moves to release the tension, Mark that and reward. I like stepping backward, which is communication to a dog to follow you - it's an invitation.
3. Let go of the collar and mark and reward again for eye-contact, and then release your dog.
4. When your dog is good at following you when you take a step, begin building on that concept. Take a step, Mark, and reward your dog for moving with you. Then take another step and do the same thing again. Then let go, reward and praise your dog, and release. Repeat as above with two steps backward.
5. You will also want to practice with stepping to the side, both left and right. You can use a little bit of luring to help your dog with the sideways movement. Then fade out the luring as soon as you can.
6. You are not pulling or forcing. It's just a little tension, and then you are waiting for your dog to give in to the pressure and following you.
7. Then begin moving in different directions, circling, walking, etc. so your dog gets good at following and moving with you while you are holding the collar.

### **Step 4 - Generalizing**

1. Now take it outside. Do collar grabs with food rewards just like above.
2. Then incorporate it with a game of tug or fetch. The reward is the game.

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3. Grab the collar while playing tug. Grab the collar after your dog brings back the ball or frisbee. Then resume the game again.
4. You can also do this with a harness.

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### Trainer Tip

With the game of tug, if your dog has a hard time letting go automatically or on cue, you can use a collar grab to stop the tugging (apply gentle pressure forward towards you to eliminate the option to tug) and prompt your dog to let go.