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**Nebraska Humane Society
Training and Behavior Department
Behavior Helpline
402-444-7800 Ext. 221**

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Using a Head Halter

What is a Head Halter?

A head halter is a tool used to help train dogs to walk nice on a leash. It is a nylon collar with a strap that fits around the dog's nose and a strap that fits around the dog's neck. It works a lot like a horse halter. You guide the animal by guiding where his head goes. When the dog pulls ahead of you on a walk, his head is turned back toward you, preventing him from getting further ahead. This collar works much better than a choke chain because it does not allow the dog to use his opposition reflex. The opposition reflex is an instinctive response to pull against pressure. This is why dogs can pull sleds and why dogs pull ever harder when we pull on the leash. There are many brand names of halters available; some include the "Gentle Leader" and the "Head Halti".

How should the halter fit?

To be effective and comfortable for the dog, the halter must be fit properly. Most collars come with instructions about how to properly fit your dog. NHS uses the Gentle Leader, which the neck strap fits high on the dog's neck right behind his ears. It should be pretty snug, so that you can only fit one finger between the collar and your dog's neck. The nose strap should be loose enough so that it can be moved to the fleshy part of the nose, but not loose enough so that it can be pulled off. It normally rests right below your dog's eyes. The metal ring where the leash attaches should be underneath the dog's chin.

What should I expect?

Most dogs will resist the collar when it is first put on. Some dogs will react more than others. Reactions can range from rubbing their nose on the ground to using their paws to push the strap off. The best thing to do is keep the dog's head up and moving with verbal praise and treats. You can also feed the dog with the halter on. Once the dog realizes that positive things happen when the collar is on like getting food or going for walks, he will not resist.

Things to Keep in Mind:

- A head halter is not a muzzle. The dog can still eat, drink, bark, and bite with the halter on.

- Keep the leash loose. If you pull on the leash, it closes the dog's mouth. Never jerk the leash when the dog is wearing the halter.
- Do not use the halter with a retractable leash. If the dog is running and comes to the end of the leash the momentum of snapping his head back could cause spinal injuries.
- Supervise your dog while he is wearing the halter whether walking or getting him adjusted to it. Unsupervised time gives the dog a chance to figure out how to get the collar off.

Teaching the command "Quiet":

The Gentle Leader can also be effective at teaching the quiet command. When the dog barks, command quiet and pull up on the leash. This will close the dog's mouth, forcing him to be quiet. Once he is quiet, release the leash and reward the quiet behavior. Repeat until it is no longer necessary to physically close the dog's mouth.

Questions? Call the behavior helpline at 444-7800 ext. 221.