

## Gotcha Collar!

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Many dogs are uncomfortable with their collars being handled for a variety of reasons. And for a variety of reasons, it is important and sometimes necessary for us to be able to take our dogs' collars without issue. How many times have you seen someone reach for their dog's collar and the dog takes off? Many times dogs' collars are grabbed because they are in trouble, it's time to leave the park or they are in trouble. Did I mention that dogs' collars are grabbed because they are in trouble? For so many reasons, owners need to be able to grab or handle their dogs collars without their dogs avoiding your hands. This exercise will help you do just that.

This exercise also helps dogs become more comfortable with handling. Some dogs can become painfully mouthy when they are uncomfortable with being handled or if they don't want to do something; mouthing in this situation is interpreted as avoidance. Other dogs are shy about the space around them, so this exercise helps them feel comfortable with people reaching in towards them.

Step 1: Say "gotcha collar," then at an even, somewhat **slow** pace, bring your hand up to your dog's collar and grasp it. Pop a treat in your pup's mouth. Then let go of the collar. Your dog will learn that the verbal cue of "gotcha collar" means something is about to happen. Repeat, repeat

Step 2: If your pup is comfortable after a few trials of Step 1, you may move your hand faster on its way towards the collar. Don't forget to say "gotcha collar" **first** and give your dog a treat.

Step 3: If your pup is comfortable after a few trials of Step 2, you may grab the top of the collar. Eventually, you can grab all sides of the collar and at different speeds.

Step 4: After a few days of practicing this exercise and you see your dog is comfortable with you taking his collar; you may practice the exercise without cueing the dog with "gotcha collar."

Step 5: Real life: it's time to let your pup know that you are going to handle his collar all the time, anytime -- not just training set-ups. It's time to introduce free trials. Sneak some treats into your hand or pocket. After few minutes, walk over to your dog, take his collar, give him a treat, and then let go. Don't bother with his collar for another 20 minutes or so. Try to be random about taking your dog's collar throughout the day.

Make sure to read your pup. **Don't move** on to the next step until you see your puppy is comfortable and ready for more handling. Some signals to watch for that can tell you that your dog is overwhelmed are: he is shrinking away from your hand, his eyes get wide as you take his collar, he quickly licks his lips right under his nose (maybe even a few times in a row), his tail tucks, he cowers, he haunches his back -- you could see one or more of these behaviors. If you are seeing them, take a step or two back, working more slowly.