

# DogWise Ireland

## **Which is best for your dog – Collar or Harness**

This is a question that comes up regularly. The short answer is, if you teach the puppy/dog how to walk nicely beside you, on a loose lead without changing sides or going in front of you, then it really doesn't matter what you have on them, they learn to stay beside you through training rather than the type of collar or harness you use.

From experience what tends to happen with the majority of puppies or young dogs is that, as soon as it is possible to take them out for a walk, the lead goes on and off they go with the owner 'winging it' in the hope that their dog will walk nicely on the lead. For most owners this is not what happens, the dog either goes on strike because he/she is worried about the collar and lead or the owner ends up being the one who is taken for the walk. Once they learn to use their bodyweight and pull, a lot of owners will opt for a harness so the puppy/dog is comfortable but unfortunately it then means the person at the end of the lead has very little control any more. What you need to bear in mind is that harnesses were originally designed and used to give an animal maximum pulling power i.e. sled dogs, tracking dogs, horses pulling a cart etc.

What really needs to happen is that the owner invests some time to teach the puppy/dog what is required when on the lead. Here are a few tips to help ...

When you start teaching something new, start at home where it is quiet. Only progress to new locations when they understand what you want. If they haven't fully grasped what you are teaching when at home, you can't expect them to do it elsewhere. Don't be afraid to give it a few weeks teaching these things in the house and garden before going for any walks, while your puppy is growing and developing they should not be going for long walks. Teach the puppy/dog to sit for the lead going on and off.

Use the lead for lots of things – food times, play, short training sessions. This builds a good association with the lead.

Start by showing the puppy/dog where to be when walking beside you. Teach a food follow - treat held low in front of their nose, take a few steps and reward. When they get the hang of this start to bring the hand and treat just above their head, when they take a few steps watching the hand, give the treat.

It can take a little time, but it is worth it in the long run.

*By Judith Owens Poole, DogWise Ireland.*