

YOUR EXTRAORDINARY XL BULLY: CREATING A MUZZLE MASTER

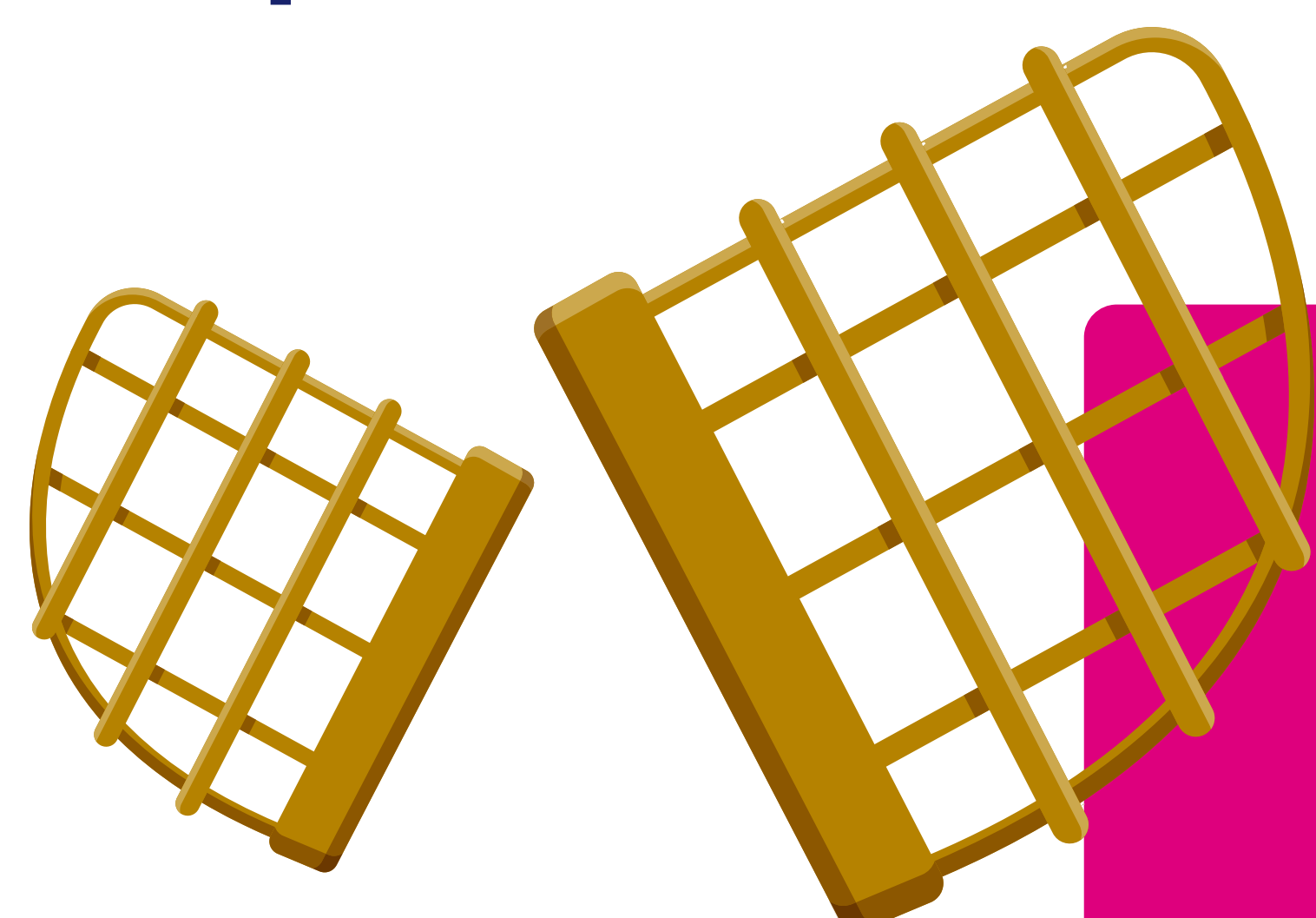


With restrictions looming over the XL Bully as a breed, such as compulsory muzzles in all public areas (including inside vehicles), it's now more important than ever that we take the time to skill up your brilliant XL Bully to make sure they can feel safe, comfortable and confident in their muzzle, no matter the situation!

Let's dive into some top muzzle tips and train your dog to love them!



WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A MUZZLE



When selecting a muzzle for your dog, your ideal option will be a basket-type muzzle that allows your dog to open their mouth to pant fully and comfortably and take a drink.

The muzzle should also allow them to eat or take treats/food rewards.

MY MUZZLE IS MY SUPERHERO CAPE!

Preparing your dog to love a muzzle and be completely comfortable wearing one will set them up for successful, positive experiences - but it has to be trained FOR the situation, long before you try and use it IN the situation.

And it can all start with a fun, simple game using a plastic cone, yoghurt pot or any other item your dog can safely and comfortably pop their nose in!

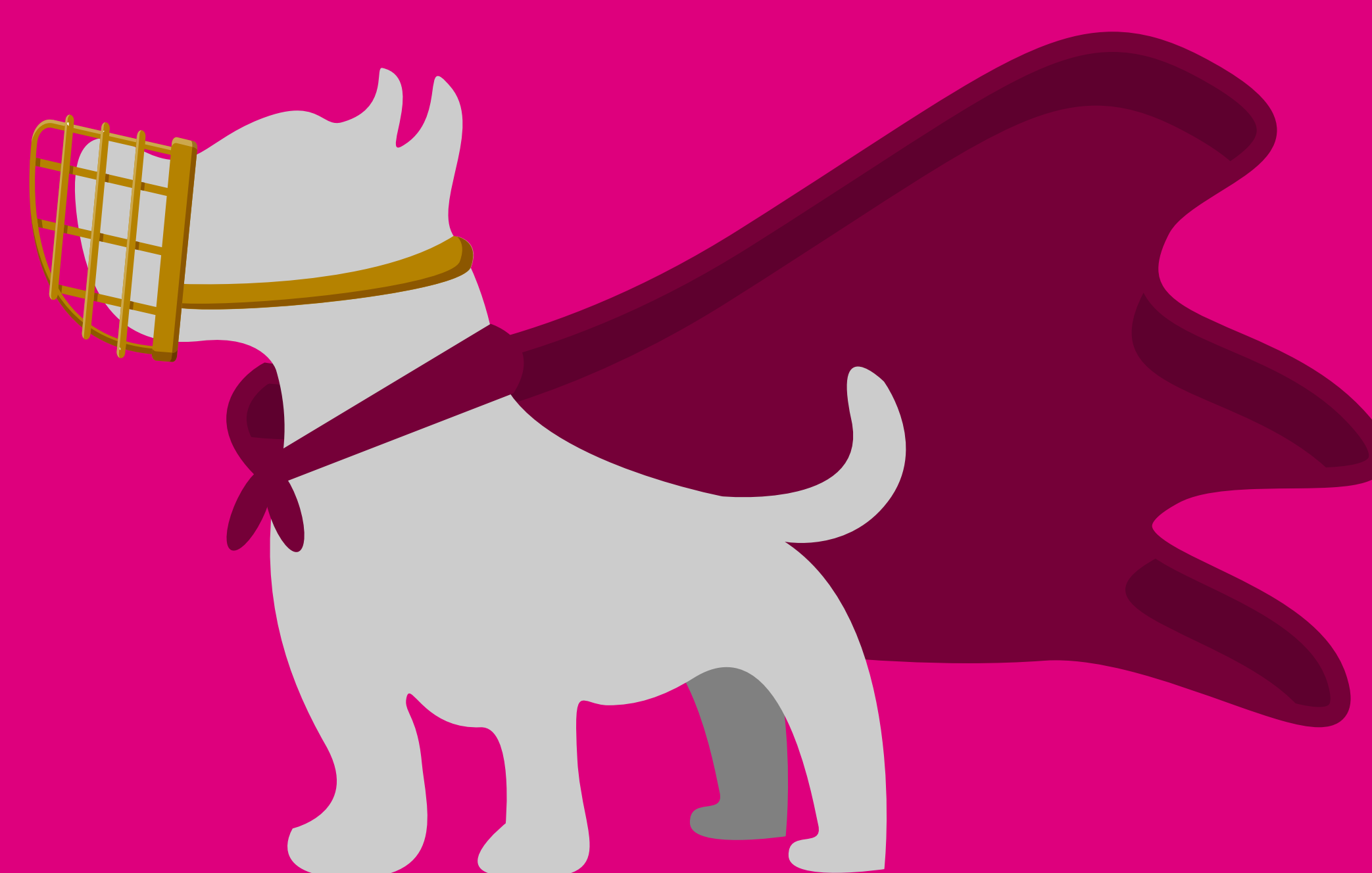
WHEN WEARING A MUZZLE, YOUR DOG SHOULD BE ABLE TO:



Pant Fully

Take Food Rewards

Take a Drink



MUZZLE PREP: CONE GAME

This is a vital exercise for all dogs as it is the foundation of teaching your dog to love wearing a muzzle!

It helps get them comfortable with having their head and face handled AND it's a fun game that grows their optimism and confidence too!



BEFORE YOU BEGIN:

Make sure you have a large enough object that your dog can safely put their head in, like a traffic cone, large mug, plant pot, yoghurt pot etc.



STEP 2

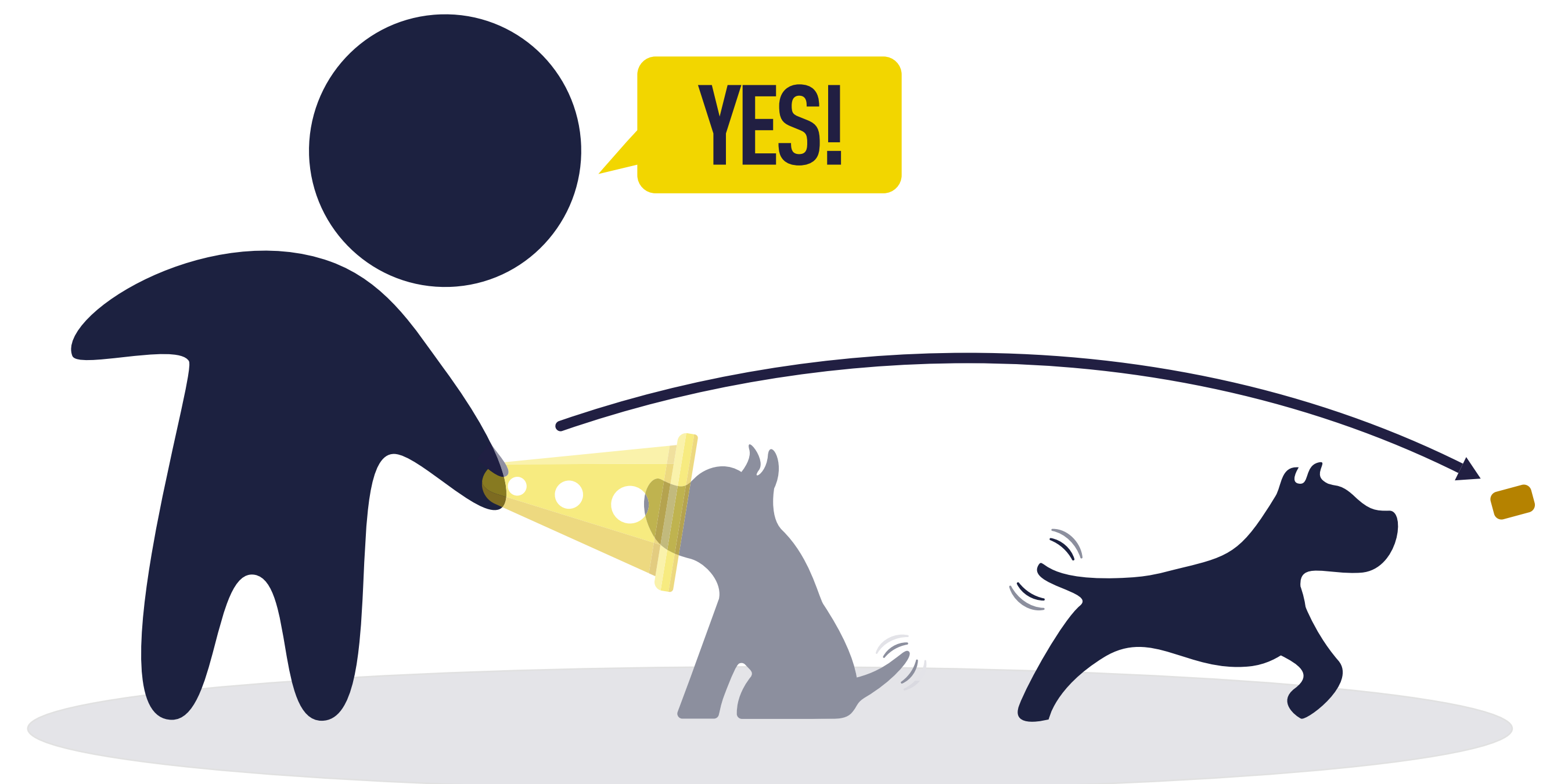
Continue to mark and reward movement closer and closer to the cone, continuing to feed away to reset them for another go.



STEP 1

Present the cone to your dog and start by rewarding any interaction your dog offers. They might take a step towards it or glance at it.

Mark "Yes" and reward by throwing a piece of food away from you to give your dog a pressure release and the option to re-engage with the game.

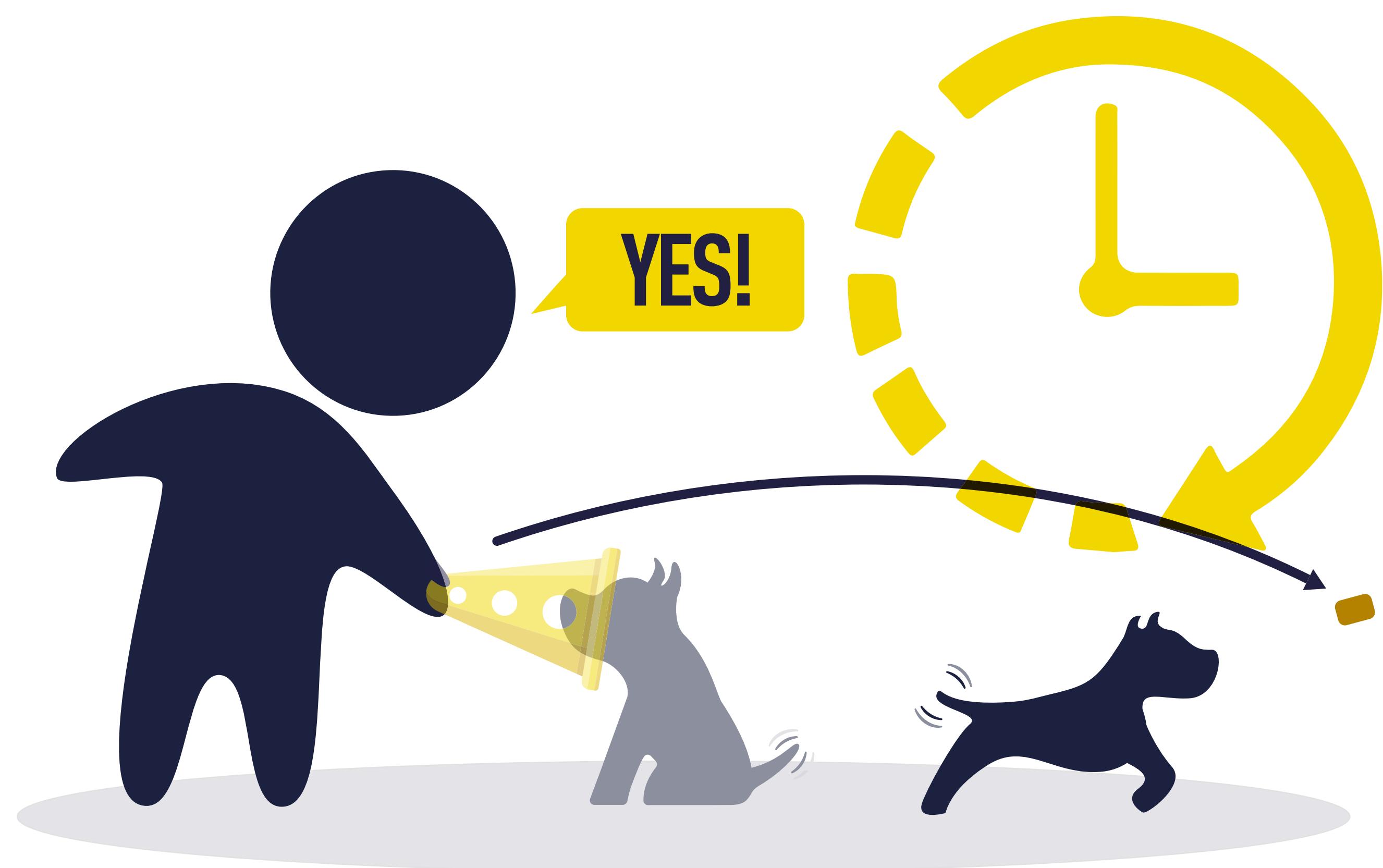


STEP 3

Once your dog is happily interacting with your cone, see if they are willing to choose to pop their head inside.

Achieve this in small steps, working at your dog's pace and watching for signs they are hesitant or unsure.

At no point should you be trying to put the cone over your dog's face.



STEP 4

Once your dog has built value for putting their head in the cone, it's time to add some duration to the behaviour.

Present your cone and when your dog pops their muzzle in, delay marking and rewarding and see what they choose to do.

Do they keep pushing into the cone, waiting for you to mark and reward?



STEP 5

Build up the duration, letting your dog lead the learning and make sure they are "all in" with the experience.

STEP 6

Now you can switch the cone for other items to generalise the learning.

Use a variety of items your dog can safely place their muzzle in - yoghurt pots, mugs, hats - get creative!

TOP TIP: Reward Strategies

You can adjust the way you reward depending on your dog. Once your dog has got the idea that the game is about interacting with the cone, you might find it helps to feed in the cone to reinforce the value rather than rewarding away to reset the behaviour.

If you have a cone with gaps or a hole in the end, feeding through the slits or dropping treats through the holes can really help your dog see this as a great deal.

Think about what is going to be most reinforcing for your individual dog - remembering not to put any pressure on your dog to do more than they are comfortable with.



THE MUZZLE MASTER GAME

Once your dog is happily putting their nose into a variety of objects with the Cone Game, let's start playing the game with the muzzle, following the same steps.

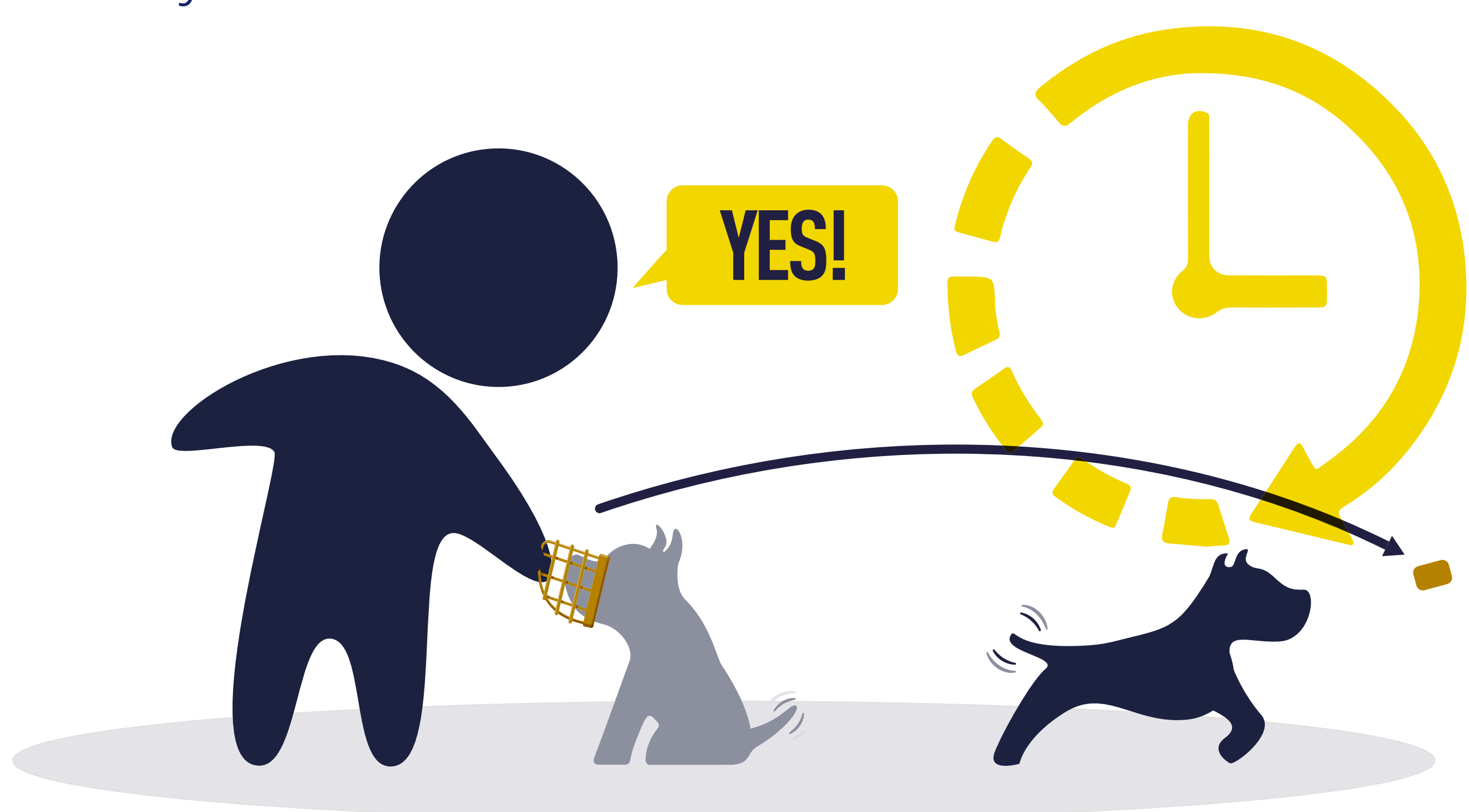
The key difference now will be the muzzle's strap which secures it onto your dog's face, so it's even more vital to make every step positive and fun. Let your dog lead the learning and have control of the experience, and don't expect to work through all these steps in one session.



STEP 1

Present the muzzle to your dog and reward any interaction they offer. They might take a step towards it or glance at it.

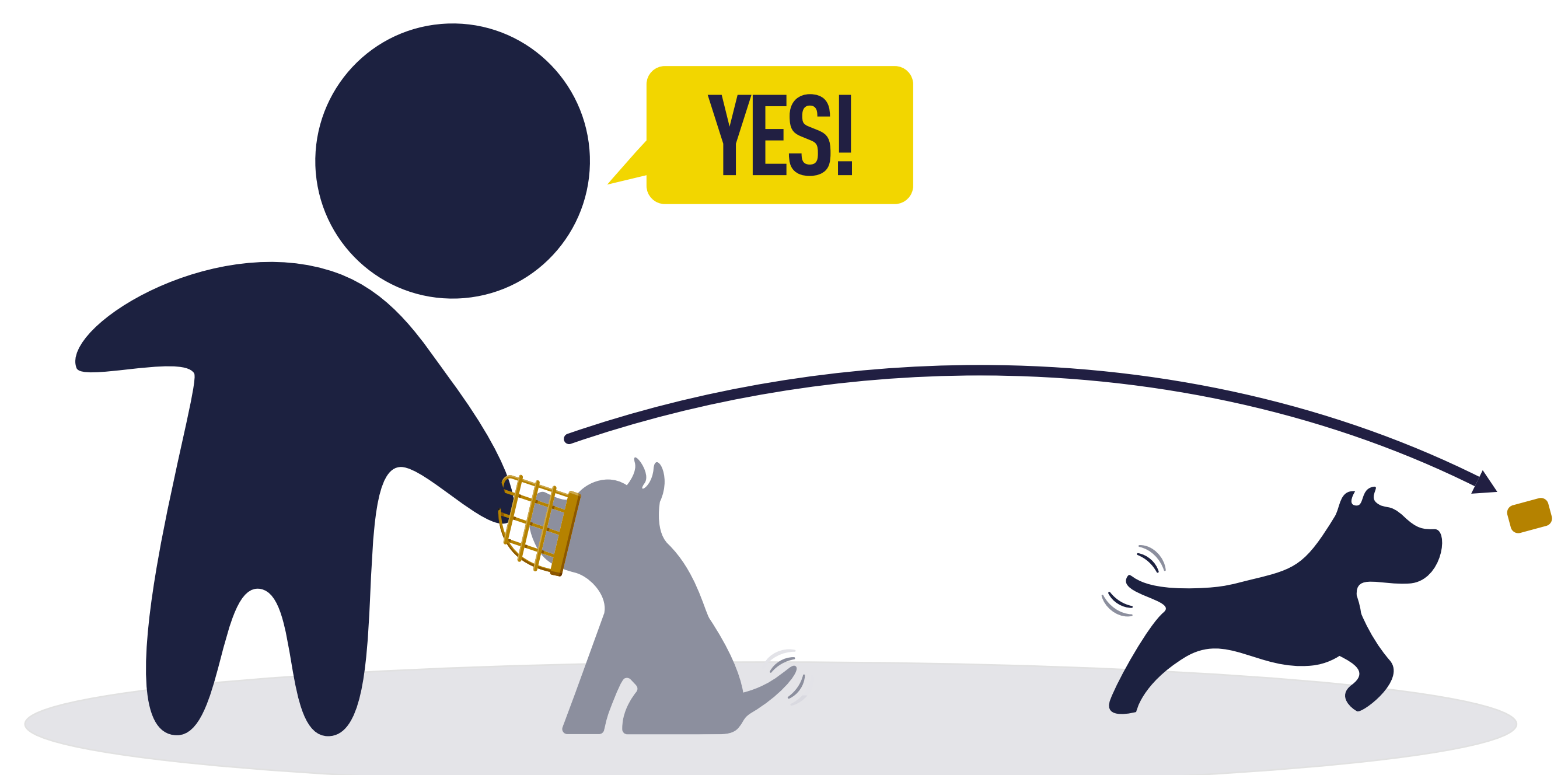
Mark and reward by throwing a piece of food away from you as before.



STEP 3

Begin to build some duration into the behaviour as you did with your cone.

TOP TIP: Smearing something tasty on the front of the muzzle on the inside can add a yummy surprise for your dog when they offer the behaviour!



STEP 2

Now wait for your dog to put their nose inside. Mark and reward as before, resetting them for another go.



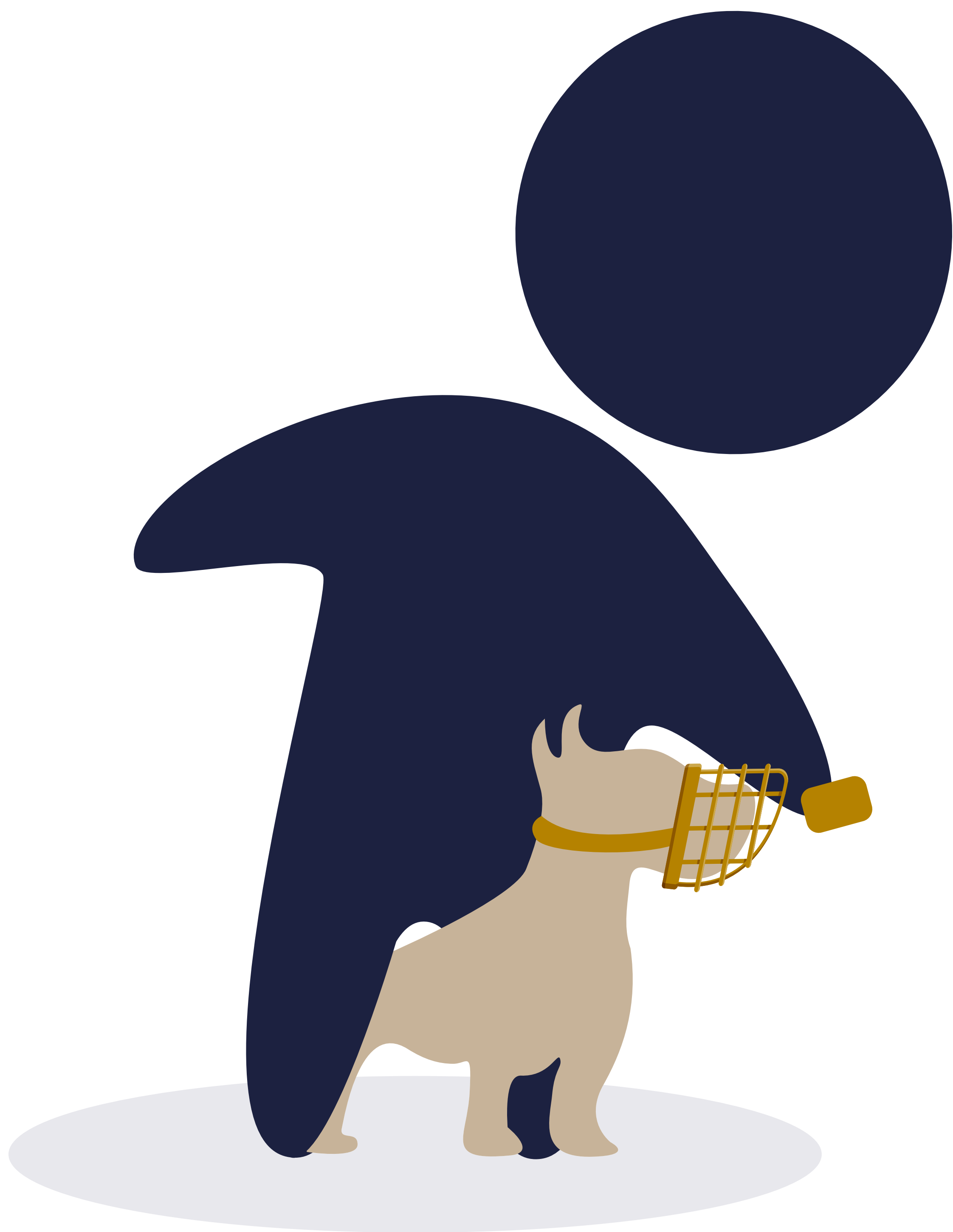
STEP 4

With your dog happily offering some duration, wait for them to pop their nose in the muzzle then briefly hold the strap (don't clip it up yet), before taking it off and rewarding away.

STEP 5

Once your dog is totally happy with that, work at their pace until you can bring the strap round and clip the muzzle on.

Make sure they remain happy, confident and engaged at each step, so throw in some easy wins so it's not always getting harder.



STEP 6

Time for a superhero power pose! Clip the muzzle on then get your dog doing some behaviours they love - then unclip the muzzle and reward.

Continue to grow this with duration and rewarding between multiple power poses before unclipping. As your dog's comfort and confidence in wearing their muzzle grows, you can then start adding in short durations of walking around your home and allowing them to keep it on whilst resting on their bed.

Don't forget to give them some easy wins and don't always make it harder. If your dog starts pawing at the muzzle, you might have gone too quick or added too much duration and need to go back a few steps.



MUZZLE MASTER PRO TIP

If you work to create a truly positive pairing with your dog's muzzle and build their optimism about the experience, they really can go out into the world feeling like a superhero!



WHEN IS A MUZZLE NOT THE RIGHT OPTION?

While teaching your dog to be happy wearing a muzzle is a super skill, and one we think every dog should learn, as an XL Bully, your dog will be required to be on lead and muzzled in public spaces, so there are still some really super important considerations to be aware of so you can ensure you are being your dog's very best advocate!



TOP TIP: Ask yourself "Is this situation right for my dog?"

It's so important that a muzzle isn't used as a way of putting your dog in an unnecessarily stressful situation. While there is huge benefit in teaching your dog to love wearing a muzzle, it is not a free pass to put your dog into situations they aren't skilled to handle and you know they won't cope with.

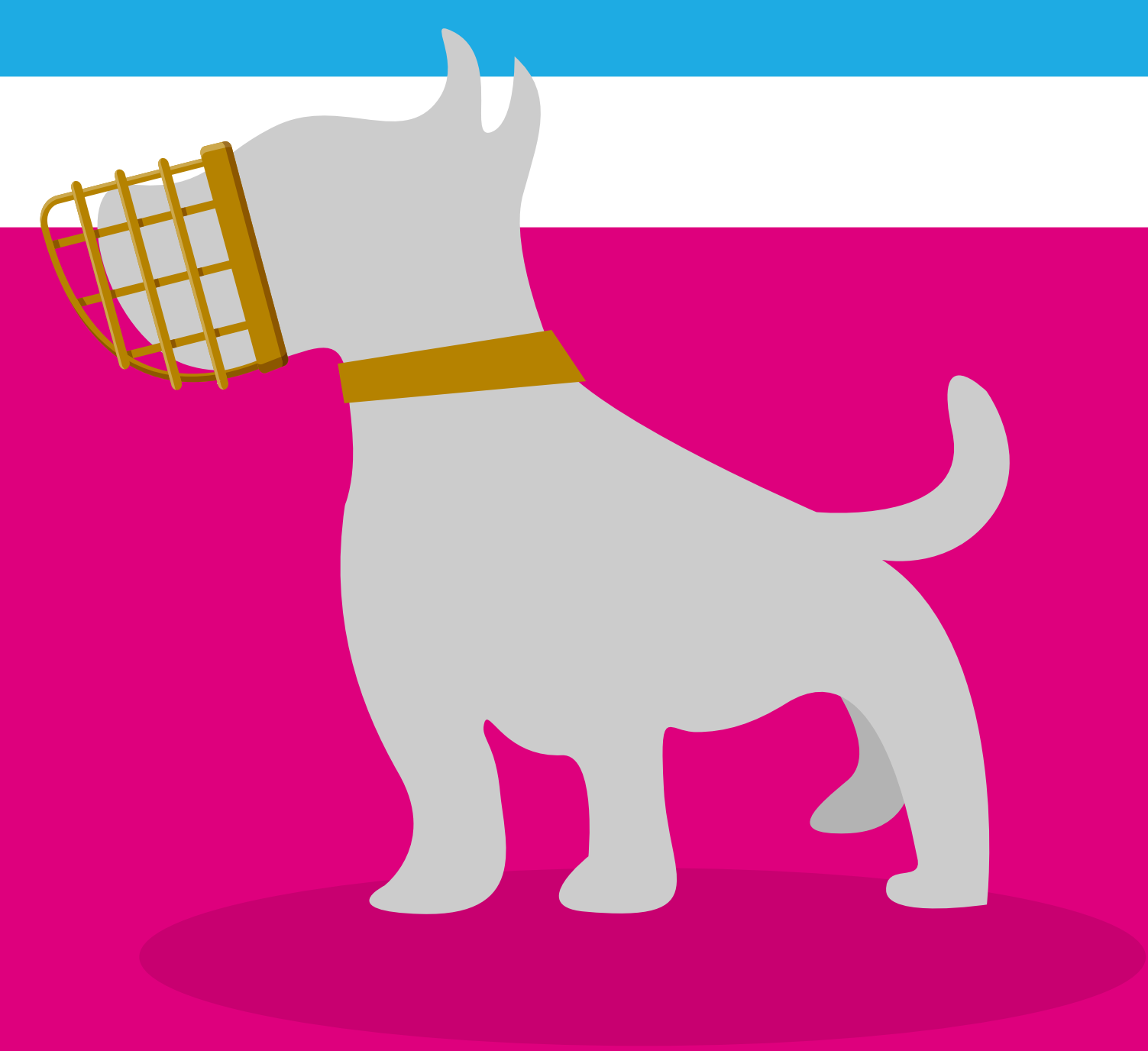
If your dog struggles to interact with other dogs, a muzzle isn't a fair or appropriate way to try and integrate them into a group of dogs. If you know your dog finds close interactions with dogs or people or even being in crowded, busy environments worrying, your job as their super owner is to work outside of those situations to grow their skills, before putting them in those situations.

TOP TIP: Always remember a muzzle isn't punishment!

A muzzle should never be used as punishment. When your dog exhibits inappropriate behaviour (e.g. reactivity, barking, counter surfing), it's a sign they lack the necessary skills to respond in an appropriate way.

Muzzling your dog in an attempt to teach a lesson or express displeasure won't address the root issue and may lead to negative associations with the muzzle.

Just as you wouldn't resort to aversive tools for any other training struggle, you shouldn't use a muzzle to "teach your dog a lesson."



Instead, it's about nurturing their understanding of calmness, disengagement, and the value of proximity, so focus on providing the training input and support your dog needs to navigate situations more appropriately.