

HARNESS TRAINING

Pigs require a specially designed harness because they have no neck to speak of. A pig can easily slip out of the traditional dog harness so start out correctly with a pig harness. My personal favorite is **Ross Mill Farm's Comfort Fit Safety Harness**, available from them or me. With all the colors to choose from, you are sure to find one that suits your pig's artistic taste and wardrobe.

Harness training should not be attempted until your pig trusts you and is totally comfortable being touched all over. During your touching sessions, try taking measurements of your pig's neck and girth with a cloth tape. This will be helpful when adjusting the harness (off the pig) before the initial fitting. Take your time and be patient. Rub the harness on the pig's body. Let your pig sniff and root the harness. This is called desensitization. Here are the steps for harnessing your pig:

1. Prior to putting the harness on, adjust the neck and body straps as closely as possible to the approximate size of your pig.
2. Place some food in a dish or in a pile on the floor. Lay the snapped neck strap on the floor surrounding the food. When your pig goes for the food, gently lift the harness over his head.
3. If the pig moves away, do not try to hold him still. He will come back to you. Again encourage him to allow the harness to be placed over his head.
4. Once the harness is around the neck, the strap that goes behind his front legs can be snapped. Remember: **The snaps should be on the pig's left side.**
5. Minor adjustments can now be made to both straps by unsnapping one strap at a time. If your pig moves or backs up, be patient; again, don't try to make the pig stand still and do not grab at the harness. Let him come back to you to finish the adjustments. By not frightening the pig he will gradually learn that putting on the harness is easy.
6. Once you have accomplished the initial stage of harnessing your pig and want to attach a leash, you must do so in a small space. Keep the leash loose until you teach the pig to respond positively to any pressure you apply to the harness.

When the harness is in place, most pigs act as if nothing is different. But getting it on may take several attempts. It's best not to push the pig too hard too fast. If your pig gets upset, quit the session and try again later. It's important for this to be a positive experience for the pig and what is more positive than eating! Distract your pig with food treats and use soft words of praise during harness training.

After you have successfully harnessed your pig several times and he is familiar with its feel, attach the lead and let him drag it around the house. Be sure you are training in an area where the lead cannot catch on objects that will make it taut. The tightness will cause your pig to feel trapped and he will most likely freak out. Your goal is to make this process painless and as nonthreatening as possible.

When you feel your pig has had ample experience with the harness being taken on and off and is familiar with dragging the lead around, it's time for you to attach yourself to the other end of the lead. Walk ahead of the pig (harness in hand) shaking a treat can and using a command such as "this way" or "here." Don't pull on the lead. Instead, coax the pig forward with the promise of a treat. When the pig follows your command, stop and reward Mr. Pig for his good work. Continue this process for short periods of time and before you know it, you and your piggy will be taking longer walks each day. If your pig should bolt for some reason, it is best to let go of the lead and regain his attention with the shake can. Be sure you are training in a secure area.

Take any training slowly. Don't expect to be able to introduce your pig to a crowded shopping mall or a family picnic upon completion of your initial harness training. You must desensitize your pig to different sounds, environments, and situations in a logical manner and in a safe space before subjecting him to real-world happenings that could be dangerous.