



Leash Walking

The Expectation

Leash walking is one of the more difficult skills to teach a dog. It does not come naturally to them to be tied to someone while they are walking, just as we would have a hard time walking if we were tied to the person next to us. This is a skill that takes time and patience but is well worth the training once we accomplish it.

How to Teach Walking Nicely on a Leash

- We recommend a 4ft to 6ft leash. Retractable leashes will allow your dog to pull away from you so until they have this skill mastered we like to make it easy for them to succeed by only giving them a small area to move around in freely.
- Start in a distraction-free environment such as a living room or your backyard instead of taking them around the neighborhood at first. We want to practice their walking skills in an environment where they have very little to be distracted by and therefore will focus more on us.
- Put their leash on and begin by encouraging them to be near you. Use a happy voice to praise them when they are standing nicely next to you on the leash or giving you their attention and follow this praise up with tasty treats.
- Next take a step or two in any direction. Encourage them to follow you and praise and treat them when they do. Start with just a few steps at a time making sure you are telling them what a good boy or girl they are along the way. If they are happily following you, increase the amount of steps you are taking while continuing this process.
- If they are not following you, do not force them by pulling on the leash or speaking harshly. This will only make them freeze up more or possibly shut down completely. Dogs are masters at picking up on our body language so if we are frustrated, they will sense that.



- Try to be patient and take note of anything that may be making them nervous in the environment. Dogs can be sensitive to certain flooring, unfamiliar objects, and noises.
- Allow them time to get familiar with their surroundings, their leash, and collar. If you are unable to get very far in the walking lesson, that's ok. Remember that this is a skill you'll want them to do well for their whole life so it's better to take it slow and steady than to rush and create a dog who is fearful of leash walking.
- Once you are able to walk 10-15 steps in one direction with them following along, you can start to position them where you'd like them to walk next to you on your left or right side. We do this by giving them treats only in that area right next to your side. We call this the "sweet spot." Rather than reaching out to treat them wherever they are, bring the treats down right next to your side. This will encourage them to stick in that spot.
- When your dog can walk nicely next to you for short distances in your distraction-free environment you can then move your training sessions to a realistic outside setting. When you move outside remember there are now many more things for them to be distracted by. Go back to taking only a few steps at a time. Keep the same practice of praising and treating them for staying near you and giving you attention.

Important Notes

- If your dog becomes too overwhelmed by the environment to focus on you then give them some time to investigate their environment before starting the training. Allow them to sniff and look around for a brief time. When they've adjusted, use your happy voice to get their attention back on you.
- Be generous with your praise and treats. You will be competing for their attention with all the other smells and sights around them. You have to be the most rewarding thing for them to focus on. If your walking lessons are always full of treats and praise, your dog will grow to love walking right along next to you.



Pulling

- Pulling should be dealt with as soon as possible. The longer the behavior goes on, the longer it will take to correct.
- Puppies will naturally test their boundaries when learning how to walk on a leash. Adult dogs with a history of pulling will continue pulling for as long as they're allowed to. Whether you have a brand new puppy who pulls or a 5 year old dog who pulls, now is the best time to start the training.

How to Handle Pulling

- Go back to basics. Start in a low distraction environment like a backyard or an empty field. Practice taking just a few steps at first and encourage them to stay near you with praise and treats. If you are having success you can gradually increase the amount of steps you take.
- When your dog looks like they are about to start pulling use your happy voice to grab their attention and bring them back towards you. If you're not able to get their attention back on you, use either the "tree method" or the "this way" method, listed below.

Stop Pulling Using the "Tree Method" & "This Way"

Tree Method - When your dog starts to pull and you are unable to get their attention back, become a tree. Plant your feet and don't allow them to move. Whether it's towards things to sniff, people to greet, dogs passing by, or anything else, don't allow them to do it if they are pulling. These things will become their rewards. When they relax on the leash then they can sniff and greet until their heart's content.

This Way Method - When your dog looks like they're about to start pulling, say "this way" and then walk in the opposite direction. Repeat this every time they are about to start pulling. The idea is that once we start walking unpredictably, they have to pay closer attention to the way we are going and therefore pay more attention to us. This is our opportunity to treat and praise them for giving us their attention which will encourage them to continue walking nicely next to us.



Tools to Help with Pulling

- It's very important that every time you take your dog for a walk you are consistent with your leash walking rules and that they are never allowed to pull. But since we don't always have the time to turn every walk or potty break into a walking lesson there are some tools that can help reinforce these rules.

- We recommend using a harness or a gentle leader. Harnesses can work great to stop some dogs from pulling. For strong pullers, a gentle leader will be your best option. These work similar to the way a head halter on a horse works. They strap around the head and make pulling uncomfortable for the dog but without causing pain. These can be fantastic training tools to help your dog stick to their leash walking manners.

- We strongly advise staying away from any tools that cause pain including prong collars, e-collars, and choke chains. Research has proven that using these types of tools that cause the dog pain can have serious negative effects including increased aggression.

- Remember the most important thing is that we stick to the golden rule: they are **never** allowed to pull. If we are consistent with this rule, they will learn over time that it's not even an option to pull and you will be able to enjoy a lifelong walking companion.