

Loose Leash Walking

Why Do Dogs Pull? Dog pulls for a variety of reasons... They pull because they like to move faster than we do. They pull because they have not been trained to “not pull.” They pull because they are stimulated by the environment. But most likely the biggest reason dogs pull is because **we reward them for pulling by moving forward when there is tension on the leash.** They continue to pull because it continues to be a rewarding experience. They pull to go out the door. They pull to go sniff that bush. They pull to greet that other dog. They pull to get to the dog park.

Training your dog to walk on a loose leash is really not all that difficult but the key to success is consistency. **If you want your dog to walk on a loose leash you must vow that from this day forward you will not move – not even one tiny step – if there is tension on the leash.** This will mean shorter walks for a while. If you normally walk for 30 minutes - then you will spend the first 15 minutes walking away from your house and the last 15 minutes walking back towards home. You may only make it to the next door neighbor’s house and back home the first day but each consecutive day you will be able to walk just a little bit farther.

Equipment: There is an endless supply of various harnesses, halters, collars and leashes designed to help teach a dog to stop pulling and you can spend a small fortune trying to find something that works. But in reality, equipment doesn’t fix or cause leash walking problems. Only training can teach a dog to walk nicely on a loose leash and almost every dog can be trained on just a collar or harness. In fact, one of the best ways to start teaching loose leash walking is indoors, or in an enclosed outdoor area using minimum equipment and relying only on reinforcement of the desired behavior.

My loose leash walking equipment of choice is a Freedom harness and a four foot leash. A harness, because there is less chance of causing trachea damage to your dog and a four foot leash instead of six foot because there is less chance of it getting tangled in the dogs legs. If you don't have a 4 foot leash you can simply tie a loop in your leash to the length you need.

What is Loose Leash Walking? More fun and relaxed than the stricter “heel” position, loose leash walking is useful when you are giving your dog permission to sniff, explore and relieve himself as long as he stays with you and doesn’t put tension on the leash. The goal is to have a dog that will walk nicely on your left side, slightly in front of or slightly in back of you.

Let's Get Started: You're going to start by holding the end loop of your leash in your right hand. Now put that hand against your belly button and keep it there! Your dog can't learn how close he needs to be to you if the distance keeps changing. Your left hand is now free to pat your leg to encourage your dog, to feed treats, to give your dog a scratch, wave at a passing friend, or whatever... except if you have a large strong dog... then you will most likely need to put both hands on the end of the leash.

Here are 3 simple methods of teaching your dog to walk on a loose leash. All 3 methods give your dog a job. He must keep slack in the leash in order to gain the reward of moving forward.

Method 1 - Back up: Start by getting his attention: Say his name, and then tell him "let's go" as you start walking forward at a fairly brisk pace. Try not to worry too much about where your dog is as long as the leash remains loose. As long as it does you will continue to move forward and praise him for being so smart.

The split second he puts the slightest tension on the leash, you will stop and start stepping backwards. Keep that leash hand on your belly-button and verbally encourage him to come to you while patting your left leg. Your dog should stop moving forward and turn around and start to come towards you.

As he comes towards you the leash will go slack. When this happens you will start moving forward again. As long as he keeps slack in the leash, praise him frequently and continue forward. Anytime the leash tightens, stop and repeat the above steps.

Once your dog catches on and is responding quickly you can start asking him to come back closer and closer to your left side each time before you start moving forward again.

Method 2 - Be A Tree: Start the same way you did in method 1. Say his name, "let's go" and start walking forward. The split second he puts the slightest tension on the leash, stop moving! Don't say or do anything... Be a Tree! Just wait patiently until he causes the leash to go slack. The split second he does - start moving forward again.

Just like in Method 1, once your dog catches on and is responding quickly you can start asking him to come back closer and closer to your left side each time before you start moving forward again.

Method 3 - Change Direction: As soon as your dog puts tension on the leash you will turn and move in the opposite direction. Warn your dog as you begin to turn by saying "let's go." Always turn clockwise (to the right) as this will help to bring your dog into position on your left side once you have completed your turn.

It may take some time to teach walking on a loose leash, especially if your dog's been pulling you around for some time. Be patient and persistent. Begin in an area with no distractions such as squirrels or other dogs, and gradually increase the level of distraction as he progresses.

Some Things to Keep in Mind: Timing is everything. You must stop and start stepping backwards (method 1) or stop and wait (method 2) or turn in the opposite direction (method 3) the split second your dog begins to pull. DO NOT allow him to pull you for several steps before you respond. You also must resume forward movement the split second the dog loosens the leash.

You can speed up the training process by carrying some treats with you. Use a clicker or marker word and mark and feed each time the dog chooses to walk in the heel position. The more you do this the more your dog will choose to walk next to you.

Always keep the hand that's holding the leash "glued" to your belly-button. DO NOT allow it to move outward away from your body.

DO NOT jerk or yank on the leash with either hand or arm. Hint: If you are finding it difficult to do this try putting the leash on a strong wide belt and buckling it snugly around your hips.

Make sure that while your dog is keeping slack in the leash that you do not move your hands and take up the slack he has created. Your dog cannot learn to walk on a loose leash if YOU keep the leash tight.

Use lots of happy talk during your walk to help focus your dog's attention. You need to make yourself interesting to your dog so he'll want to stay with you rather than pull away.

Whenever you change direction, be sure to give your dog plenty of warning by using a cue like "let's go" or "this way", Be sure that when your dog is performing his job correctly (keeping slack in the leash) he never gets punished with a sharp pull because you changed direction abruptly and without warning.

Remember, this is an informal walk with your best friend! Give your dog the opportunity to stop and check out smells and enjoy his surroundings. The idea is to have your dog walk happily under control, without pulling, so that you are both having an enjoyable time.