

LOOSE-LEASH WALKING

Why train it?

To spare your arms—and your dog's trachea. It is not fun or safe for you to have a dog take you for a walk, and pulling while wearing a collar can actually damage your dog's throat. Since our dogs spend most of their time outside on-leash, training them to walk without pulling is better for everyone.

Why do dogs pull?

To get to whatever is out ahead: Great smells, other dogs, open spaces, fun and adventure. Pulling gets dogs to what they want faster. As a strategy, it works. This is why it is best to teach dogs loose-leash walking as early as possible. Pulling is rewarding to the dog, so the more he does it, the harder it is for him to give it up. If you have an expert puller, however, don't despair. Any dog can be taught loose-leash walking.

How to train it:

Step 1: Your dog learns to follow you as you move backwards.

- Load one hand with treats and place at knee height.
- Start walking backwards and reward your dog frequently for following you.
- If your dog pulls away from you, don't yank the leash and don't reel him back in. Stand still and wait until he returns to you. If he is very distracted, call his name.
- When he comes back to you, praise, treat and continue walking backwards.

Step 2: Your dog learns to stay close as you move forward.

- Turn your body to face the direction you would like to go.
- Keep your loaded treat hand low and near your dog's nose to keep his attention on you.
- Praise and treat frequently to start about every other step.

Step 3: Your dog learns to stay close as you move forward (fading treats).

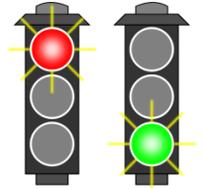
- As you are walking, move your treat hand from your dog's nose up to above your waist, pause and then give the treat. (The dog is learning - the treat going away predicts him getting the treat.)
- Gradually increase the number of steps in between rewards.
- Keep him guessing. Sometimes reward after 1 step, sometimes after 5, then again after 2, then 7.

Decide on your dog's loose leash walking zone.

This is where your dog has to be to get rewarded. After choosing this zone, stick to it. If you are not clear and always changing the rules, your dog will just get frustrated and go on pulling because it is easier than trying to figure out what you want from him.

If your dog starts pulling ahead....

- Red Light Green Light Option: Stop and wait until there is some slack in the leash again. Then take a step with him and reward him quickly for walking near you. A tight leash = red light and loose leash = green light.
- Turn and Go Option: Turn and start walking the opposite direction and reward when they catch up to you.



Ways to make walks fun for both of you!

- Let your dog smell the roses! Dogs get way more mental stimulation and enrichment from walks than physical exercise (we are slow as turtles to them!)
- Teach your dog a "go check it out" cue by saying the cue and then encouraging them to sniff things.
- Teach your dog a "Let's go" cue to get them moving in the same direction as you would like to go. Say "let's go" in an animated voice, walk in a bouncy gate and praise/treat when they catch up.
- Teach your dog turning cues. This gets them prepared to turn with you and can be as simple as a novel clicking noise, to teaching "left", "right", to "with me". Say the word/noise you choose then encourage them to follow you while turning.
- Reward generously for :
 - Your dog looking at you (eye contact) on their own. Eye contact is key to getting our dogs to follow cues when out and about in super distracting environments.
 - Whenever something occurs that could be distracting/make your dog bark i.e. other dogs barking, children playing, loud car noises...by doing this, your dog will get in the habit of looking to you when these things occur!

Training Tip: Start by practicing in very low distraction environments before moving to the sidewalks. Additionally, practicing after your dog has had some vigorous exercise like some fetch in the backyard is helpful at making it easier to practice walking nicely.