



Loose Leash Walking

Walking your dog is great exercise for you as well as your dog. The down side is that if your dog drags you, lunges, or tangles you in the leash, those walks may not be that fun. To improve your dog's behavior and the enjoyment for both of you, here are a few tips on training your puppy or adult dog to walk on a loose leash.

Why Does My Dog Pull?

First, it's important to know that dogs pull on leash because it gets them where they want to go, faster! As a result, if we want them to walk on loose leash, we need to stop dead in our tracks if they start to pull and only walk forward when they are on a loose leash. Of course, this sounds simple but getting it right can be a little tricky. Here's how to get this approach to work.

Setting Expectations

Before you even start, it's essential that you choose a specific zone where you want your dog to walk in relation to you. I recommend your dog walk by your right or left side. That's the location where you can communicate with your dog most easily.

1. Start with your dog seated next to you on your chosen side. Give one treat for sitting and additional treats, if needed, for remaining seated so he doesn't get up before you're ready to walk forward.
2. Next, start walking. You probably never thought you needed a lesson in walking but it turns out that most people do. If we want dogs to follow our lead and stick with us, we have to walk in a manner that makes it clear we know where we're going. That means we should generally walk at a brisk enough pace to keep our dog paying attention.

The average dog is more likely to respond to a slower speed by stopping to sniff, marking more frequently, and focusing on or pulling towards animals, people or objects in the environment. That's because, compared to his human, the environment now looks more interesting.

3. Once you've started and are walking at a brisk pace, give your dog yummy treats every time he's walking next to you and looking at you for 2-3 steps. As soon as you can get him to repeat this focused behavior 5 or more times in a row, increase the number of steps he must stay next to you and focus on you to 4-5. The goal is that by increasing the expectation but rewarding him frequently enough, your dog learns it is fun to trot by your side while focusing on you and he doesn't even try to pull ahead.

- Most dogs will want to forge ahead at some point in their walk even if you're rewarding with treats. That's why it's equally important to make it clear that if he gets ahead of you, and especially if he pulls on leash, he is going nowhere.
- When your dog starts to get ahead of you, just stop walking so that, by the time he gets to the end of the leash, you're stationary. By doing so, you make it clear to him that he doesn't get to pull, even once. If you don't stop this behavior abruptly or you have the leash in your hand and let your dog pull your arm forward then he instead learns that he can pull a little or pull sometimes. This sends him mixed messages and prevents him from learning that walking on loose leash is what works.
- Once you've stopped you must wait for your dog to come back and look at you. At first when he gets to the end of the leash he may pull a little bit. Call him back to you and have him sit before starting to walk again.
- These are the basics to getting your dog to walk on a loose leash. Start in a relatively low distraction environment like inside the house or in the backyard and work up to increasingly distracting situations when your dog is ready.