

# Loose Leash Walking

Contrary to popular belief, dogs that pull on the leash while being walked do not want to be pack leader, top dog, alpha, or dominant over their human. There is a much simpler explanation: dogs love to be outside, and the walk is a stimulating and exciting part of their day, so the desire to push ahead is very strong.

A leash, though vital for safety, can also be frustrating for a dog, because being 'tied' to a person essentially stops a dog's ability to act naturally. That being said, all dogs should be taught how to walk on the leash in a positive way without being jerked, yanked, choked, or shocked, so that walks can be enjoyable for everyone.

If you are overpowered by your dog's pulling and can't start teaching for fear of being pulled over, there are humane equipment solutions (i.e., no-pull harnesses and head collars) to help modify the pulling while you teach your dog to walk appropriately.

- A **chest-led harness** is a perfect training aid, as it takes pressure off a dog's sensitive neck area by distributing the pressure more evenly around the body. When the leash is attached to a ring located on the chest strap and your dog pulls, the harness will turn his body around rather than allowing him to go forward. This harness is great for anyone who needs extra help, because safety must come first.
- Some dogs are so strong that a canine **head collar** is needed, which acts the same way a halter does on a horse. Whenever the dog pulls, it automatically brings his head around. Head collars can help in severe cases, especially with pregnant women or the elderly, but dogs need time to get used to them, as they can be uncomfortable at first.
- Avoid the use of **choke or prong collars**, as these devices cause pain and significant physical damage to your dog's neck.

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## Training Techniques:

### The Stop and Be Still Technique

Leash pulling is often successful for the dog because the person inadvertently reinforces the pulling by allowing the dog get to where he/she wants to go when pulling takes place. But you can change this picture by changing the consequence for your dog.

- Whenever the dog pulls, immediately stop and stand completely still until the leash relaxes because your dog either takes a step back or turns around to see what the heck is going on back there!
- When the leash is nicely relaxed, proceed on your walk.
- Repeat this as necessary.
- It may take a while but patience and consistency is worth it! You will have a well-behaved dog walking by your side in no time.

### The Reverse Direction Technique

- If you find the preceding technique is too slow, you can try the reverse direction method.
- When your dog pulls, issue a 'let's go' cue, turn away from him/her, and walk off in the other direction without jerking on the leash.
- You can avoid yanking by motivating your dog to follow you with an excited voice to get his attention.
- When your dog is following you and the leash is relaxed, turn back and continue on your way.
- It may take a few turns, but your vocal cues and body language will make it clear that pulling will not be reinforced with forward movement, whereas walking calmly by your side or even slightly in front of you on a loose leash will allow your dog to get to where he/she wants to go.
- You can also reinforce your dog's decision to walk close to you by giving a motivating reward when he is by your side (like a tasty treat!)

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## Training Techniques (cont.):

### Vary the Picture

- Once your dog is listening to you, you can vary the picture even more by becoming unpredictable yourself. This requires your dog to listen to you at all times, because he/she never knows when you might turn or where you are going to go next.
- Instead of turning away from him/her when you give the 'let's go' cue, reverse direction by turning toward your dog. You can turn in a circle or do a figure eight. Any of these variations will get your dog's attention.
- Do not forget to provide praise for complying, because the better you make your dog feel when he/she is walking close to you, the more your dog will choose to do so.

### What Not to Do:

- Do not yank your dog around. While it might be tempting to use your dog's leash as a correction, rely more on teaching your dog what to do than correcting all the time.

### Troubleshooting:

- **Problem:** My dog is fine walking on the leash but when he sees other dogs he loses his mind and pulls ahead of me.
- **Solution:** In short, change direction before he gets to the point where he reacts.

NOTE: This article was adapted from the Victoria Stillwell Positively Website: Loose Leash Walking.

For AAWL adopters who need more information or if you have additional questions, please call our Behavior Helpline at 602-273-6852 ext. 124.