

Polite Leash Walking – Training and Equipment

Pulling on leash is often reinforced by being allowed to move forward. In other words, a dog pulls because it works to get them where they want to go faster. The following protocol will use that same reinforcer, moving forward, to teach your dog to walk more politely. The goal of this procedure is not for your dog to walk perfectly at your side, but rather to walk on a loose leash and still be allowed to explore the environment politely. The rules are simple: pulling gets you nowhere, walking nicely gets you wherever you want to go.

Consider the environment: Your dog is more likely to be distracted by the environment (and therefore less likely to be able to focus on training and learning with you!) if there are a lot of new or exciting smells, sights, or sounds. To help them have the best chance of getting it right, start in a very boring, very familiar space. This could be your living room, your back yard, or anywhere else where your dog is most likely to be able to pay attention to you. Yes, you can practice loose leash walking in your house!

If your dog pulls forward: stop walking. Stand firmly with the leash at your waist (hold with two hands!) and quietly wait for your dog to release the tension on the leash. Don't ask them to do anything, and whatever you do, don't move forward!

When your dog releases the tension: resume walking. Use a verbal marker like "yes!" or "good work!" as you begin to walk forward again.

If your dog goes to the end of the leash again to pull: repeat the above steps. Wait for tension to release before moving forward again. In the beginning, it might seem like your only moving forward one step at a time. It takes time for your dog to learn these new rules, so be patient and be consistent. If you're finding that you're having to stop every one or two steps, try walking in a *different direction* each time your dog releases the tension and you resume your walk.

If your dog takes multiple (as few as 2 in the beginning) steps on a loose leash: click and treat (if your dog has experience with clicker training), or deliver any kind of reinforcement (verbal praise, treats, scratches, etc.). Reinforce often for walking with a loose leash.

Reinforce checking in, every time! Click/treat or make eye contact with a big smile and enthusiastic praise every time your dog looks up at you.

Pay attention to what your dog likes! If they want to sniff that fire hydrant or like to rub against those bushes, allow them to do so as long as they're walking politely. The walk will be more enjoyable for your dog to get to go where they want to go, and it will be more enjoyable for you if they aren't dragging you all over the place!

More tips! Some other tricks include walking more briskly or jogging alongside your dog if they are on the trail of something really smelly, and changing directions often to make it more likely that your dog will look to you for direction. Don't forget to tell them how smart they are every time they look up at you! Rather than focusing on how far you can walk in a straight line, structure your walk in a way that allows your dog to explore the environment in their own way, while learning to walk more politely. Sometimes the best walks are a shorter distance but full of lots of good sniffing and learning.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Youtube channel "Dog Training by Kikopup", search: loose leash walking

Youtube channel "Smart Bitch Modern Dog Training", search: loose leash walking

Youtube channel "Kay Laurence", search: connection

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Recommended equipment: We recommend using a front-attaching harness for dogs who are big, strong, or otherwise likely to pull. There are many advantages to using this type of walking equipment, including:

- By attaching the leash to the harness on your dog's (as opposed to over their shoulders), your dog will be less likely to pull forward into the pressure of a taught leash. Instead, when there is pressure on the leash, they are more likely to turn back to you, allowing for you to more easily manage their behavior by turning and walking in the opposite direction if they were pulling toward something you'd rather avoid, ask them for a different behavior they have been learning to keep their attention on you, or simply reinforce the really smart choice they made to turn to check in with you rather than focusing on something exciting or scary in the environment. In contrast, a leash that connects to a harness over the shoulders actually makes it easier for your dog to continue pulling forward when they feel any tension on the leash – picture sled dogs pulling with all of their might despite all of the leash pressure from the weight of everything they are pulling!
- Safety first: equipment that connects with the leash around the dog's neck like any sort of collar can pose a safety to any size dog. For smaller dogs, the amount of pressure that can be put on their neck from pulling can cause painful medical problems like a collapsed trachea. For bigger dogs, that much of pressure can reduce the amount of oxygen getting to their brain which can further impact anxious or stressed behavior. A front-attaching harness removes the pressure from your dog's neck making for a safer and more humane equipment option.

Not only is it a safer option for your dog, but it will give you more control and help your dog learn more quickly about walking on a nice loose leash. **See How to Choose a Dog Trainer handout for more information about options for walking and training equipment.**

While the walking equipment you choose is an important part of the training and management equation, no piece of equipment alone will be sufficient in changing your dog's behavior. A front-attaching harness is an excellent addition to a training plan that uses positive reinforcement to help your dog learn an important skill, which will make for a more enjoyable walk for the both of you, ultimately improving the relationship between you and your dog.

Front-Attaching Harness Brand Recommendations:

The Freedom Harness: has the option for attaching the leash to the chest or over the shoulders, depending on the activity (over the shoulders for pulling you up a steep hill or mountain, on the chest for practicing loose leash walking).

The Easy-Walk harness: Two clips allow you to clip the harness over the head, or for a dog who is more head shy or worried about something going over the head, and unclip and clip around the neck and then again around the chest.

PetSafe 3 in 1: multiple points for adjusting to fit differently shaped dogs, and options for attaching the leash to the chest or over the shoulders.

The Sensation Harness: slips over the head for an easy one-step clip around the chest.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES for helping your dog love to wear their harness:

Youtube channel "Dog Training by Kikopup", search: harness