



TEACHING 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. A regular collar, harness (including an Easy Walk), or Gentle Leader is recommended. No choke or prong collars please! 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. It will take patience and the understanding that during training you may not walk far!

How to train it:

Step 1: Your dog learns to stand calmly next to you without pulling away.

- Load one hand with treats (the hand nearest the dog). Place your dog on either side of you with a six-foot lead attached to his collar. Have plenty of additional yummy treats in an easy to access pouch.
- If your dog is on your right (you should practice on both sides), hold your clicker in your left hand with your bunched up leash. The leash should hang loosely in front of your body. Your right hand is free to reward your dog in position next to your right leg.
- Click and treat when your dog is calm and/or looking at 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. Practice in a less distracting environment.
- When he comes back to you, click and treat. Praise him enthusiastically.

Step 2: Your dog learns to stay close to you while walking.

- With your dog standing calmly next to you, say his name and, "Let's go."
- Click and treat your dog for taking that step with you and staying by your side.
- Take another step. Click and treat. Repeat. Click and treat if your dog is progressing with you.
- With each step, click and treat your dog for staying with you.
- Keep walking and click/treat every other step.
- Gradually increase the number of steps in between clicks.

Step 3: Your dog learns not to pull.

- If your dog starts pulling, stop and begin walking backward slowly.

(continued...)



LOOSE-LEASH WALKING (CONTINUED)

- As your dog slows back to your pace start to move forward. Click and treat as the dog remains at your side.
- If your dog is energetically pulling, stop, turn 180 degrees and begin to walk in the opposite direction. Then click and treat your dog for catching up and remaining by your side.
- Gradually increase the number of steps in between clicks.
- Keep him guessing. Sometimes reward after 1 step, sometimes after 5, then again after 2, then after 7.
- As your dog begins to understand he needs to stay close and keep pace with you, gradually add distractions such as walking outside, and near other dogs and people.
- As you add new environments and distractions you may need to start over at the one-step-at-a-time and clicking and treating after each step.

Training Tips:

1. To be successful you need to maintain a very high rate of reinforcement when your dog is walking nicely by your side. Not rewarding enough is one of the most common reasons for failure.
2. In the beginning keep the leash short, but not taut, so your dog doesn't have a lot of space in which to pull away from you.
3. Feed quickly after each click.
4. Desensitize your dog to the head halter, if you are using one, before proceeding with this exercise.
5. Never allow your dog to pull you, which will make the behavior stronger and harder to stop.
6. Try practicing loose-leash walking after your dog has had some vigorous exercise. He will be much easier to work with then.
7. Be sure to keep it positive and upbeat-- no yelling and no jerking or yanking on the leash!

Troubleshooting: If your dog pulls and you don't get a chance to click and treat, apply red light/green light. As soon as your dog pulls and the leash goes tight, stop. Wait for the leash to loosen even just a little bit and then walk forward. Be prepared to stop again if your dog pulls again so the leash tightens. Your dog needs to learn that a tight leash is a red light that stops the walk. A loose leash is a green light that means more walking.

Especially helpful when...

You want to take your dog on a long exercise walk.

You need to maintain control over your dog especially in potentially stressful situations.

You need to teach your dog that you are the leader and you don't want to be dragged around.