

LOOSE LEAD WALKING

Most dog owners enjoy walking their dogs. Whether that be a neighborhood stroll, hiking the local trails or hitting the backwoods with your dog safely leashed, walking is a great way to bond, socialize with others, and to share experiences with your canine best friend! But if your dog does not know how to politely walk on a loose lead, your walk can turn into a frustrating tug-of-war as your dog walks *you*! Teaching your dog to walk on a loose lead takes time, patience and practice. You'll need to take a step-by-step approach — literally! Don't go on a long walk until your dog shows you that they are ready to do so without pulling. To start with you'll need the proper equipment. We recommend:

- **A nylon buckle collar or martingale collar.** For large, strong dogs who pull, a front clip harness can be a good choice. For small dogs (under 20 lbs.) a back clip harness may be the most comfortable attachment for leashing your dog.
- **A four- to six-foot nylon or leather leash.** Retractable leashes should be avoided during the training period for loose lead walking. These leashes keep continued pressure on your dog's collar or harness making it difficult to reward them with a loose connection during the training process.
- **Training treats.** Bring along tiny pieces of whatever your dog loves to eat.

Loose Lead Walking Exercises

- **Red Light, Green Light:** The golden rule to teaching your dog not to pull on their leash is to stop whenever the leash goes tight! Never follow your dog when they are pulling. As soon as you see the leash go tight or you feel a tug, stop. That's a "red light." Call your dog back to you with a happy tone, pat your leg, or step backwards to encourage their return. If they do not return to you in a few seconds, lure them back to you with a treat. When there is visible slack in the leash again, you have a "green light," so go ahead and move forward a few steps. Remember, when you are training, it's not about how far you go! It's about going forward without pulling, even if that means only a few steps at a time.
- **The Sweet Spot:** Reward your dog when they are in the "sweet spot" — when they can successfully take one or two steps on a loose leash by your side. It is fine for them to be slightly in front of or behind you, as long as you have a loose leash. Offer them treats frequently — as much as every two or three steps they can go without pulling. You can use the seam of your pants as a guide: when your dog is positioned there and moving with you (within a step or two in front of or behind you), pop a treat in their mouth or drop one on the ground in front of them. Praise him with a happy up-beat tone. You want your dog to learn that good stuff happens when they are by your side on a loose leash!
- **Crazy Walk:** Walk your dog using both of the above exercises. However, shake things up by not just walking in a straight line. Once your dog can successfully take a few steps in one direction with a loose lead, give your dog a verbal cue and quickly

pivot turning right or left. Walk in a square shape or make random turns to teach your dog to be attentive to you on leash and to follow your lead on a loose leash. Praise and reward forward movement on a slack leash, but stop walking when your dog gets overeager and starts to pull on the leash.

Tips

- Try to exercise your dog to burn off some steam before you take him to practice loose lead walking.
- Practice in quieter environments. The fewer distractions for your dog, the more attentive they'll be to you. You can practice in a large room, your garage, in your backyard, or driveway and sidewalks if you live on a quiet street. Parks can be very difficult training environments during hours where there are lots of people and other animals. Keep it simple especially during the initial training stages.
- Keep your leash a consistent length, and anchor the hand (or hands) that you hold it with. Try holding the leash with both hands and secure your thumb into your waist band or pocket. Constantly changing the length of the leash by extending and retracting your arm or balling up the leash then letting it out is confusing to your dog. Fixing the length of the leash to about four feet while you are training helps reduce distractions and gives the dog a fair chance at learning the rules of the loose lead walking game. (This is why retractable leashes are discouraged for training.)
- Think about investing in a training treat pouch. You can put these on you belt or hook them into your pocket. They make rewarding your dog much easier with less fumbling and fewer delays, especially when you are walking. (These are fairly inexpensive and readily available at pet supply stores.)
- Think about this exercise in terms of time, not distance. It's better to practice for a set amount of time rather than to set a distance goal.
- Vary your pace and your direction as you repeat this exercise. It's good to shake things up, but make sure you're going at a pace appropriate for your dog.
- Never move forward when your dog pulls. If your dog pulls, stop until they stop pulling.
- Be patient! This will take time, practice and consistency, but it will pay off.