



Loose Leash Walking

There are many ways of teaching loose leash walking and you may want to use several of the methods below. While teaching loose leash walking, your walks may not look the way they normally do and they may not provide the same level of physical exercise. While you may want to take your dog for a walk before he is fully proficient at not pulling, it will be more beneficial for you and your dog if you focus on this training during walks and then include additional enrichment at home. Use one or more of the methods explained here to train your dog, and if you need to walk him on leash before he understands not to pull, just understand that the process may take longer.

Setting up for Success

Start in an area with few or no distractions. You won't be able to hold your dog's attention if there are other pets, children, squirrels, rabbits, etc., running around.

Use a flat collar or harness while training your dog. In some circumstances, you may need to use a head halter. If you do use a head halter, be sure to condition your dog to wearing it before using it on your walks. Never use a choke collar or prong collar.

Use high value treats, like cheese, hot dogs, or any type of dog treat that your dog loves.

Make your loose leash criteria very clear—reward for NO tension on the leash, and do not allow your dog to pull even a little bit because it is too difficult for the dog to learn the difference between pulling a little and pulling a lot. A good sign that the leash is loose is that the leash clip is hanging straight down from your dog's collar or harness.

Getting Started

Start your training session with your dog in a sitting position at your side with a loose leash. As you step forward, tap the side of your leg to encourage her to walk with you. Treat every one or two steps as long as your dog is not pulling. If your dog is having trouble and continues to pull, treat more often.

Keep your dog's interest by using your voice, tapping your leg, or making high-pitched sounds. Treat as long as the leash is loose. Anytime the leash tightens, stop moving. Wait until your dog looks back at you, call them closer to you if needed, and then keep walking. If your dog continues to pull, you probably need to move to a less distracting environment or use higher value treats.

Use a cue such as “with me” or “let's go” when you change directions.

Gradually increase the number of steps you take before treating.

Tips

- When you walk your dog, change directions frequently. This makes you more interesting to your dog and encourages her to pay attention. Give your cue word before you change direction and avoid pulling on the leash.
- Remember to start in a place with few distractions and gradually work up to locations where there are more distractions.
- Loose leash walking is a more relaxed behavior than a formal “heel.” Heeling requires that the dog be intensely focused on you. This is very tiring for the dog and doesn’t allow him the freedom to sniff and explore, which is important for his mental and emotional wellbeing. If you would like to teach a heel, use it only when you need extra control—when crossing the street or walking in a crowd.
- With a puppy, these methods will work fairly quickly (if you are consistent). If you are working with an adult dog that has been practicing pulling for months or even years, this is going to take longer. Be patient and positive.

Walking Tools

These tools may prevent your dog from pulling as hard but they will NOT teach your dog to walk on a loose leash. Some dogs do learn to pull even while wearing these tools. Use one of these tools while you are working on loose leash walking to prevent setbacks in your training resulting from successful pulling. You may have to experiment with several tools to find the one that works the best for you and your dog. You may also need help getting the tool properly fitted.

- *Front-clip harnesses:* The leash on a front-clip harness attaches to the front of the harness on the dog’s chest (instead of on the dog’s back), so that when he pulls, he is turned back toward you. There are a few different brands of front-clip harnesses. Homeward Pet recommends the Wonder Walker Harness (which we use at the shelter and make available to all of our adopters). Other brands include the Sensation/Sensible harness and the EasyWalk harness.
- *Head Halters:* Head halters are a collar with a strap that goes around the dog’s nose, and the leash is attached under his chin. When the dog pulls, the head halter causes his nose to be turned back toward you, making it physically difficult for him to pull. There are several different brands of head halters (Gentle Leader™, Halti™, Canny

Collar™ and Snoot Loop™, to name a few). Head halters must be properly fitted, introduced gradually, and used appropriately. See our handout for more information.