

WALKING ON LEASH



By and large, leash-pulling masks the real problem: without a leash you would probably be without a dog. It is indeed a sobering thought to think that most dogs prefer to forge ahead to sniff the grass or other dogs' rear ends than to walk by their owner's side.

There are some dogs who simply don't want to walk beside owners who keep yanking the leash. However, regardless of why your dog pulls, all dogs need to be trained to walk nicely on leash. If not, they are unlikely to be walked at all.

Trying to teach a dog to heel using leash prompts and corrections requires a lot of skill and time. And even then, all you have is a well-behaved dog on-leash. Let him off-leash and he's history; you cannot safely take him for off-leash rambles, and you still cannot control him around the house, where he is off-leash all the time.

Luckily, there are more effective and enjoyable ways to get the job done. First, teach your dog to follow off-leash. Second, incorporate many sits and stays for control and attention. Third, teach your dog to heel off-leash and on-leash. After following these steps, you will find it is easier to teach your dog to walk calmly on-leash.

Teach Your Dog to Follow Off-Leash

Your dog's desire to follow and remain close is the necessary foundation for walking politely on-leash. You must become the center of your dog's universe. You need to stimulate and strengthen your dog's gravitational attraction towards you by moving away enticingly and heartily praising your dog all the time he follows. Click your fingers, slap your thigh, or waggle a food treat or a toy in your hand to lure the dog to follow. Proceed with a happy heart and a sunny disposition: talk to your dog, tell him stories, whistle, walk with a jaunty step, or even skip and sing.

Do not accommodate your dog's improvisations; you are the leader, not the dog. Whenever your dog attempts to lead, accentuate his "mistake" by doing the opposite. Stretch the psychic bungee cord: if your dog forges ahead, slow down or smartly turn about; if your dog lags behind, speed up; if your dog goes right, turn left; and if your dog goes left, turn right. Practice in large areas, such as in your backyard, friends' yards, tennis courts, dog parks, and safe off-leash areas. Feed your dog his dinner kibble, piece by piece as you walk. Once your dog is following closer, time yourself while practicing following-courses at home, going around furniture, from room to room, and from the house to yard.

Sits, Downs, and Stays

Enticing your dog to follow off-leash takes a lot of concentration and it is easy to let your dog drift. Consequently, instruct your dog to sit or lie down and then stay every ten yards or so. Frequent sits, downs, and stays teach your dog to calm down and focus. They also give you the opportunity to catch your breath, relax your brain, and to objectively assess your dog's level of

attention. Sitting is absolute: either your dog is sitting or not. Only have the dog sit or lie down for a couple of seconds (just to check that he is paying attention) and then walk on again. Occasionally ask your dog to lie down for a minute or so to watch the world go by. You will find that the more down stays that you integrate into the walk, the closer, calmer, and more controlled your dog will be when following you.

Teach Your Dog to Heel Off-Leash & On-Leash

Instruct your dog to sit, and then lure him to sit using a food or toy lure in your right hand. Transfer the lure to your left hand, say "Heel," waggle the lure in front of your dog's nose, and quickly walk forwards for a few steps. Then say "Sit," transfer the lure to your right hand to lure your dog to sit, and maybe offer the kibble as a reward if your dog sits quickly and stylishly. Repeat this sequence over and over. Practice indoors and in your yard, where there are fewer distractions, before practicing in the dog park and off-leash walking areas. Then just attach the dog's leash and you will find he heels nicely on-leash.

Walking On-Leash

Teach your dog not to pull while you are both standing still. Hold the leash firmly with both hands and refuse to budge until your dog slackens the leash. Not a single step! It doesn't matter how long it takes. Just hold on tight and ignore every leash-lunge. Eventually your dog will stop pulling and sit. As soon as he sits, say "Good dog," offer a food treat, and then take just one large step forward and stand still again. Hold on tight; your dog will likely explode to the end of the leash, thereby illustrating the reinforcing nature of allowing your dog to pull for just a single step. Wait for your dog to stop pulling again (it will not take as long this time). Repeat this sequence until your dog walks calmly forward (because he knows you are only going one step) and sits quickly when you stop and stand still. Your dog quickly learns he has the power to make you stop and to make you go. If he tightens the leash, you stop. But if he slackens the leash and sits, you take a step. After a series of single steps and standstills without pulling, try taking two steps at a time. Then go for three steps, then five, eight, twelve, and so on. Now you will find your dog will walk attentively on a loose leash and sit automatically whenever you stop. And the only words you have said are "Good dog."

Alternate heeling and walking on-leash. For most of the walk, let your dog range and sniff on a loose leash, but every 25 yards or so, have your dog sit, heel, and sit, and then walk on again. Always sit-heel-sit your dog when crossing a street: sit before crossing, heeling across, and then sitting on the other side of the street.

To learn more, read the *Open Paw Four-Level Training Manual* and *Doctor Dunbar's Good Little Dog Book* and watch the *Training The Companion Dog* DVD series—all available from your local pet store or www.amazon.com.

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