



LOOSE LEASH WALKING

Taking your dog for a walk can be a one of the most enjoyable ways to spend time together. Walks with your pup will be exponentially more enjoyable if you help him to develop fantastic loose leash walking skills. We define loose leash walking as:

- 🐾 Your dog walking on one side, not switching back and forth and potentially tripping you.
- 🐾 The leash is slack most of the time. Picture the leash looking like a 'J' from your hand down to the snap attached to the collar or harness.
- 🐾 Your dog goes at your pace (i.e. slowing down and speeding up when you do).
- 🐾 Your dog stops when you do.
- 🐾 Your dog moves forward when you cue him, to do so (by saying something like "let's go").

Loose leash walking is not the same as heeling. Heeling requires a dog to walk with their ear lined up with the seam of your pants. This is a precise behavior done in an obedience competition for brief periods of time. Heeling is not a realistic expectation for companion dogs out for a leisurely walk with their family. But, loose leash walking is a realistic expectation if you make lots of time to help your pup learn how to walk with you in a mannerly fashion.

Baby Steps

Young puppies are programmed by nature to be great at playing 'follow the leader' because sticking close by their caregiver is in their best interest. As a pup rapidly matures and gains confidence, this inclination to stick super close is likely to dissipate. So, try to get started on the foundation of following skills while on leash as soon as possible so you can take advantage of your pup's preference to stay close. Because really, loose leash walking is about your dog following you about whilst on leash.

Prep for Success

- 🦷 Purchase a treat pouch. There's a reason professional trainers use treat pouches; Having rewards readily available is far better than having to fumble in your pocket to find one. Once your pup has developed great on leash manners, wearing a treat pouch won't be necessary.
- 🦷 Have a variety of tiny, tasty, healthy treats in your treat pouch.
- 🦷 Consider using a long, skinny tug toy for those pups that like to play tug as a reward. But, consider that tiny food rewards are usually a more efficient way of rewarding to start.

Practice Indoors

While the ultimate goal of loose leash walking is to walk your pup outside, set the foundation for this challenging skill indoors. It is far easier for your pup and you to focus on the training game indoors rather than out. While this plan of action takes time, the end result is an adult dog that has a truly solid and reliable skill that is based on a super solid foundation.

Engagement

- 🦷 Breaking down a more complicated skill into small steps is a brilliant way to achieve your goal. Start with some simple eye contact exercises.
- 🦷 The moment your pup makes eye contact, say your marker word (yes or good) and reward.
- 🦷 Take a step away from your pup and wait for him to follow and make eye contact so you can mark and reward again.
- 🦷 Even once your dog has mastered the art of loose leash walking, it is advisable to continue to occasionally reinforce those moments when your pup engages with you in highly distracting environments by making eye contact.

Sit By Your Side

- 🦷 Be prepared to practice this simple foundation skill a number of times because most dogs will orient to be in front of us (which is where we typically reward them for sitting).
- 🦷 Start by asking your dog to sit by your side, mark with a word like “yes” or “good” and reward.
- 🦷 Take a step away from your pup and lure him (by holding a tiny bit of food at his nose that you can move to get him to follow) to one side of you and into a sit. Mark and reward.
- 🦷 Repeat in many 3-5 minute sessions. With practice you will notice your pup will start following you as you take a step away and offering a sit without the need for a lure.

Step, Stop, Sit

- 🦷 Have your dog sit by your side, say something like “let’s go” to encourage him to move with you, take two or three steps, wait for him to offer a sit (or lure if still needed), and mark and reward.
- 🦷 Repeat so your pup learns to move promptly forward with you when you say “let’s go,” stays by your side as you take a few steps, and offers a sit by your side when you stop.
- 🦷 For some pups, even a tiny bit of movement forward is enough for them to explode with excitement. Be prepared bring your hand with the treat down to their nose to help prevent him from jumping and to lure him into a sit as you stop.



Taking it to the Streets

Teaching a dog to pay attention outdoors can be a daunting task. But, a solid foundation of engagement, sitting by your side, moving forward on cue, and stopping to sit or stand when you stop will make the whole process easier for you and your dog when you head outside.

- 🐾 Be sure to have your pup exhibit at least a few seconds of impulse control (sitting and waiting) at the front door, prior to rewarding him by opening it.
- 🐾 Practice in your hallways and lobby often.
- 🐾 Avoid allowing your pup to greet other dogs on the street. While this social interaction might be fun for your dog, it will undoubtedly make it far more challenging for you to teach him to walk on a loose leash because he will be pulling towards other dogs. Further, you'd be hard pressed to find a professional trainer who hasn't hear many, many horror stories of dogs being injured by an on leash greeting with another dog.

Things you can reward for on a walk

- 🐾 No tension on the leash
- 🐾 Eye contact (your dog can't simultaneously pull AND look at you),
- 🐾 Hand targeting
- 🐾 Sit, down, and stand

Putting on the Breaks

Pups that have benefitted from loads of practice sessions indoors are typically far less inclined to put on the breaks when out for a walk. They enjoy the game of step, stop, sit and follow the leader. However, if your pup does put on the breaks, try staring straight ahead with light tension on the leash. Your pup is pretty likely to step forward after a moment or two. Praise him for a great decision. Repeat if he stops again. This response of turning 'off' when he stops and back 'on' when he moves forward will make it clear to him that the former gets him nothing, but moving forward with you is fun and rewarding.

If you are concerned that your pup is putting on the breaks because of being afraid of being outside or because of a specific person, place, or thing outside, please contact your trainer to discuss.

Avoid unintentionally rewarding pulling by allowing your dog to pull through doorways, when walking down the hallway towards the elevator; out the lobby towards the street, pulling to greet other dogs, or really towards anything or anyone. Pulling should get your dog nowhere fast. Simply put, a loose leash results in the reward of moving forward; a tight leash is the break which stops the walk from continuing in the direction your dog wants to go. Stop, ask your dog to do something (eye contact, sit, hand target, really anything that shows you are in this together and working as a team).

Of course you can teach an adult dog to master loose leash walking. But, undoubtedly it will be more of a challenge than teaching a puppy. The reason for this is that your dog will have had a history of learning that pulling works. If your dog gets where he wants to go by pulling you it means the behavior of pulling has been reinforced (albeit unintentionally).