



Leash Training

All dogs should be taught basic leash skills, regardless of age, size, or lifestyle. This is an important skill for your dog whether he is just going for a walk around the neighborhood, or going into a crowded veterinary office. Good leash training is key for the safety of you and your dog!

Before You Start:

- Make sure your dog has an appropriate collar that fits him properly, as well as a suitable leash. Some research can be done to determine whether your breed of dog would benefit from a collar or a harness. Items we **do not** recommend for your dog are retractable leashes, pinch collars and shock collars.
- In the beginning, make sure that you keep treats or other reward with you for your dog.
- Use a marker for good behavior to signal desired behaviors. A clicker or an emphatic “yes!” will work.

Keep Sessions Short:

- If you are leash training a puppy, start inside your home. This is where your puppy will be most comfortable. Once you think it is time, you can move the training sessions to your backyard. Be sure not to take your puppy out on training sessions anywhere else until he completes his full series of vaccines.
- If you are working with a puppy or an adult dog who has never had any leash training, start with short, positive sessions.
- It is a good idea to teach your dog to walk on one side of you, and be consistent with this so he does not run back and forth from side to side.

Prevent Pulling:

- Begin by isolating your dog’s correct behavior. Even if he is a serious puller or all over the place, there will be times in which he stops long enough to let the leash go slack.
- The instant the leash goes slack, mark and give a reward. Timing is very important as he needs to associate the slack with the treat.
- If your dog walks nicely without pulling or dancing around, mark and reward him periodically to give him a reference point. This helps him to realize that the way he is walking is the desired behavior. If he understands that you like when he walks calmly without pulling, and sometimes forgets or gets overly excited, forgetting his manners, be sure to mark and reward when he resumes the polite walking.

If your dog has already formed the habit of pulling on his leash, you must convince him of two things: pulling will not get him to his destination any faster and that walking politely will make you happy enough to reward him.

- If you are training a puppy, or if your adult dog is very responsive to you, try the “no forward progress” approach to pulling. In other words, teach your dog that if he tries pulling toward something, you will stop forward progress. Soon he will realize that pulling to get to something does not work. The instant the leash goes slack, mark and reward, and then continue walking. If your dog pulls again, stop again, and repeat. It may require spending a few days going for short, slow walks, but many dogs figure it out very quickly.

Troubleshooting Common Problems:

- If your dog is such a determined puller, that when you stop, he just pulls more, turn around and walk the other way. Do not tug on his leash, talk to him, or wait for him. He needs to know that it is his job to pay attention to where you are, and stick with you. When he catches up to you, show him how happy you are to see him, and give him a reward.
- If your dog is a determined puller, but he will not respond to any of your training, he may need a different collar or head halter for a while, to give you better control. Your best option may be to take an obedience class or a few private lessons with an instructor.
- If your dog is weaving back and forth, or running circles around you, lure him beside you with a treat. When he takes a few steps in the right place, praise and reward him. Repeat this until he stays beside you while walking, slowly increasing the time between treats, until he no longer needs to be rewarded. If his weaving or running circles poses a risk, you may need to shorten your leash.