

Walking Nicely on Lead

Why do dogs pull on the lead?

One of the most common reasons dogs pull on lead is because they've quickly learned that's how they get to move forward. Whenever your dog pulls, taking just one step along behind them gives your dog a clear signal that pulling works, so they'll carry on pulling!

How do I stop my dog from pulling?

You'll need to teach them that walking next to you with a loose lead means they get to move forward, and that pulling you means they don't!

Teaching your dog to walk with a loose lead takes a great deal of patience and time, but it's worth it! The good news is that the training itself is simple, although it does require a commitment from you. You should expect walks to take longer while your dog is learning, but if you stick with it the reward will be enjoyable walkies with a calm, happy dog who no longer pulls and is a pleasure to walk.



Equipment

A quick internet search will reveal a vast range of equipment marketed as a 'cure' for pulling, but is any of it any good? Unfortunately, some equipment causes pain or discomfort when the dog pulls (e.g. by causing tension in a sensitive area). This is unnecessary and can be unpleasant and confusing for your dog, who still needs the opportunity to learn that pulling is not a successful way of walking forwards together.

Ideally, walk your dog using whatever piece of equipment is most comfortable for them (i.e. a flat harness or collar). If you are at risk of losing control when walking your dog, you should consider other suitable options that do not cause pain – contact your local Dog School Coaches for assistance.

Method

- 1) The second the lead starts to tighten, **stop walking**. Don't jerk the lead back – just stand and wait, calmly and quietly. If your dog returns to your side, and the lead slackens, you can walk on. If your dog does not turn back to you, try walking a couple of steps in the opposite direction to get their focus back.



- 2) **Reward** your dog whenever they are walking next to you on a loose lead. Keep some treats handy but out of the way (in a treat pouch, or pocket). You'll probably need to use lots of treats at the start, but as your dog gets better you can cut down and eventually phase treats out completely. Remember to keep walking forwards as you give your dog treats in order to avoid stopping and starting.
- 3) Initially **practise in quiet areas**, walking up and down with no distractions so that your dog can get the hang of it quickly. It's much easier for your dog to learn new behaviours in quiet places where they won't be easily distracted.



Key points

DO NOT REWARD PULLING. When your dog pulls on the lead, do not move in the direction of the pull, instead calmly wait for the lead to become slack and reward this by walking forwards again.

- 🐾 **DO REWARD** loose lead walking. Walk forwards with your dog and reward them when they are walking nicely by your side with tasty treats.
- 🐾 When the dog is in the right position the lead should always be hanging loose with no tension.
- 🐾 **DON'T PUNISH** when your dog pulls, by telling your dog off or pulling back, as they need to feel safe and happy by your side. Rewarding the right behaviour is much more effective.
- 🐾 **Be 100% CONSISTENT** each time you walk with your dog – the time this takes will be well worth the effort and make walks even more enjoyable for you and your dog.

Cheat Alert!

We all lead busy lives so if you're not able to be 100% consistent (e.g. if you're running late but you still need to pop your dog out) it can make things easier to have two different pieces of equipment – one for consistently teaching them to walk on a loose lead with and the other to use when you don't have the luxury of training-time!

You can use one harness in the short term, when you don't have time for training, to give your dog 'permission to pull' in while they're wearing it. You can use a different harness, or attach the lead to your dog's collar, for training sessions and for everyday walks once they no longer pull. Your dog will learn the difference between the two and that they can pull on one but not the other. But be aware it's likely to take your dog longer to learn to stop pulling with this method.

These resources have been created by Dogs Trust using the most up-to-date scientific-based understanding of dog behaviour and welfare needs and can be freely downloaded by anyone interested in learning more about understanding dog behaviour and training dogs.



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