



HOW TO MASTER LOOSE LEASH DOG WALKING

*How to end your frustration and disappointment about
walking your dog*

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If you've ever experienced being pulled by your dog, it can be both frustrating and dangerous.

It has become apparent that "loose leash walking" is really a complex set of interactions between the dog, the handler, and the environment!

Understanding and setting your dog up to succeed is essential if you want to enjoy relaxing walks together throughout your life.

We designed this E-Book to help pet parents from all over the world understand the many different factors that go into teaching a dog to walk on a loose leash.

Enjoy!



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WHAT DOES LOOSE LEASHING WALKING MEAN TO YOU?



The main objective of loose leash walking is for your dog to walk at a similar pace alongside you. The leash is also relaxed and does not have any tension.

Some people don't have any preference for where the dog needs to be as long as the leash is loose. While others prefer to have their dog next to them or to never forge ahead of them. There is no right or wrong. In this instance, it comes down to personal preference. Some factors to consider are what the purpose of the walk is, where the walk will take place, and your dog's size.

Some people believe that when a dog walks in front of them, the dog is trying to dominate them. This is not true at all!

Most of the time, the dog has just not been taught what the criteria for loose leash walking is. If you have preference of where you want your dog to be during a walk, you'll want to be consistent with that from the start and pass on the instructions to everyone else that walks your dog.

If you have a larger dog you may want your dog to walk behind you so that you can both fit on the sidewalk and other people can pass if needed.

When you have a smaller dog or you live in a neighborhood that has other animals like coyotes, teaching your dog to walk in front of you might be preferred. This way you can keep an eye on your dog especially if something unexpected happens.

People who walk their dogs in the city, may prefer to keep their dogs beside them and checking in frequently.

When your dog can walk calmly on their leash without pulling or lunging, your walks will become much more enjoyable.



WHY DO DOGS PULL ON LEASH ?

There are many reasons your dog may pull on the leash, here are just a few:

It works – this is the most common reason. Most dogs pull because their natural walking pace is faster than ours and walking at a human's pace is very unnatural for them. They have learnt that pulling gets them where they want to go.

Over arousal – your dog might be overexcited or has some excess energy. Genetics can play a role in your dog's energy level, and it's important to meet their needs through breed appropriate outlets.

When your dog is over-aroused, it's impossible to teach them anything let alone expect them to walk nicely at your pace. So, if you have a dog with excess energy, you'll want to find a way to use some of that pent up energy in a constructive manner beyond going for a walk or playing fetch in the backyard. What was your dog born to do? How can you give them an outlet for this natural behaviour?

Reactivity – this means your dog has a strong emotional response to certain things in the environment that is causing over reactive behavior. For example, your dog may see another dog across the street and desperately pull towards them, trying to play. Or a skateboarder rides by and they may pull in an attempt to chase. They may also pull, bark and lunge to drive things away that they are worried about. If you notice your dog has an over reactive response to certain things, you'll want to help them change their feelings about those things. You should seek help from an experienced dog trainer or behaviorist.

Fear– your dog might be fearful or anxious about being outside or in a new environment. They could be pulling because they don't feel safe and want to move to somewhere away from everything that worries them.

HOW DO WE STOP THE PULLING?

A world of opportunity opens up once you master loose leash walking. It will take time to master, but there are a few key things to understand that will help you and your dog succeed.

✓ **Discover your Dog's Candles**

Be prepared and learn what your dog's triggers are and what causes them stress

✓ **Changing association**

A dog in fear is only going look for safety and will struggle to learn

✓ **Emergency turns to create space**

Know what to do when the unpredictable happens

✓ **Teach Walking Position**

Teach your dog where you want them to be while out on a walk

✓ **Understanding Body Language**

Learn to read and interpret your dog's body language

✓ **Choosing and Using Environment**

How to assess and choose the right environment



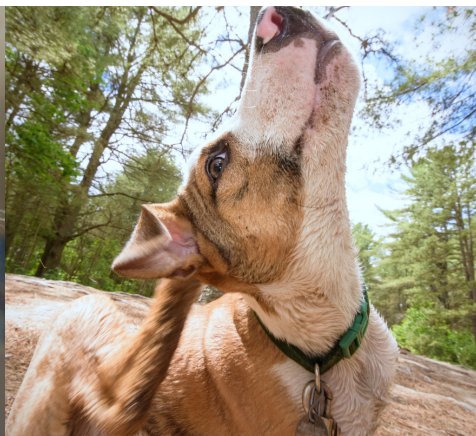
DISCOVER YOUR DOG'S CANDLES

Candles are a helpful way to think about all the factors that contribute to your dog's reactivity. Everything that makes your dog concerned or uncomfortable or over-excited is a candle. The more candles that are lit, the more likely your dog is to react. Think of it as increasing heat. And we can reduce that heat - and the reactivity - by "blowing out" candles.

Candles can be big things like joint pain or stomach pain, equipment, grooming or handling, noise, medical conditions, such as allergies, visitors, other dogs playing, or little things like the tags jangling on your dog's collar.

Some of these candles are really easy to blow out. You can change equipment or the way you handle and replace jangly tags with sliders. Other candles can be blown out or at least reduced by working with your vet. Some may be more persistent.

But if you can blow out any candles at all, the overall heat will be reduced and that is what matters.



CHANGING ASSOCIATIONS

If your dog is fearful or anxious around other dogs or unfamiliar people they may struggle to engage or learn new things because their focus will be on finding safety.

Instead of having a negative association, you want to help them change how they feel around their triggers. Instead of feeling fearful or nervous you want them to feel relaxed, happy or even optimistic.

To do this you can use the Open Bar/Closed Bar method. When your dog notices a trigger (dog or new person) feed them high value treats. Keep feeding as long as the trigger is visible and stop as soon as it goes away.

The order here is very important. The food must appear after your dog is aware of the trigger and not before. This means that the trigger will predict tasty things appearing and not the other way around! If you get the order wrong, your dog may learn that treats predict scary things happening, which can cause an aversion to treats!

Don't worry about reinforcing their reactivity. As your dog builds a new association their behaviour will change too as they are no longer afraid!



EMERGENCY TURNS

Sometimes you'll find yourself in challenging situations with your dog. Perhaps someone wants to meet your dog and is insisting on coming closer. Having strategies in place to cope in emergency situations can really help you remain calm and support your dog.

Here are just a few:

- ✓ When someone is approaching use a hand signal to back up your words – holding your palm out in front of you is a universal prompt to stop and can be seen from a distance.
- ✓ There will instance where you may need to cross the road, turn around or take a different route to avoid certain triggers. Make use of skills like Let's Go to move your dog quickly in an emergency.
- ✓ When dealing with an incoming dog you may also need to buy yourself some time so that you can get to safety. One strategy is to use a Treat Shower. Simply take a handful of treats and throw them into the path of the approaching dog.
- ✓ Remember you can use barriers in the environment such as fences, cars and roads to create safety for your dog.



PATTERN GAMES

When you're walking your dog, there'll be times that you become aware of a scenario unfolding that may make it difficult for your dog to focus on you especially if you are trying to distract them.

Be aware of your environment and try to spot things that your dog might get overexcited or worried by before you come face to face with them.

This allows you to take preventative action before things escalate. You can change your direction, increase distance, cross the street or get your dog to sit and focus on you until things pass.

Pattern games give you and your dog a familiar structure to work within when you are in a distracting environment. They are simple, rhythmic behaviors that require very little training but provide a safe thing to do when things are potentially challenging. They all involve some movement, which is often easier for your dog than being still in these situations.

The important thing about pattern games is that they ARE simple and well practiced so they are easy for both you and your dog to do even under pressure. Many dogs will feel relieved when they get to play their game because it is safe and predictable. This can get you out of trouble, perhaps allowing you to walk past other dogs, or to wait calmly while other dogs pass you. They can also help your dog relax when they get over-aroused.

These are great games to teach your dog focus and reorienting back to you when there is a sudden environmental change (SEC).

- Provides a predictable and secure structure for your dog
- Help them normalize changes in their environment
- Pattern games are fun for your dog!

BASED ON CONTROL UNLEASHED BY LESLIE MCDEVITT

PATTERN GAMES – 1,2,3 TREAT

1-2-3 Treat is a great game to play when you have to move your dog from A to B safely. The goal is to teach your dog to walk beside you while you repeatedly count 1,2,3.

Choose a location to train without distractions.

First you are going to make the word “three” meaningful to your dog. Start with a handful of treats and say “three” before giving your dog a treat from your hand. Repeat several times so that your dog begins to make an association between the word and rewards arriving.

Next you are going to add “two” into the sequence. Count out loud “two, three” before promptly giving your dog a treat. Again you’ll want to repeat this several times.

Then progress to saying “one, two, three” before giving your dog the treat. Your dog will be listening out for the word “three” and getting used to hearing the words one and two beforehand. Repeat until your dog is looking expectantly at you whenever they hear “three”.

Now you can begin to add movement. Start walking as you repeatedly count “one, two, three”, making sure to reward every time you say “three”.

Practice in lots of different places without distractions before working around low level distractions and eventually real triggers. Your dog should move into it easily and happily every time.

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TEACHING WALKING POSITION



The first thing we need to teach your dog is the position you would like them to walk in.

It's best to start this training WITHOUT a leash!

While our ultimate goal is to teach your dog to walk nicely on a loose leash, the leash can be a big distraction for some dogs. Your dog may find the movement of the leash over exciting which would make learning more difficult. Some dogs might be wary of the leash or even startle at the movement.

So, in the spirit of setting your dog up for success, you want to begin training without a leash.

TEACHING THE WALKING POSITION

There are many ways to teach your dog where you want them to walk. Once you've decided where you want them to walk relative to you, you can begin training. Here are some of our favorite games and techniques.

Teach Position without a leash

Grab some high value, delicious treats and show your dog the goodies!

Reward your dog at your side with your tasty treats, and then start walking. As your dog catches up to you, mark when they are close to you and reward with a treat (Be sure to offer the reward low enough that your dog can take it with all four paws on the ground.)

If you consistently reward in the same place, your dog will be more likely to seek out this location as you walk together.

Practice moving away and rewarding your dog whenever they choose to follow and reward them in position. As your dog gets good at this, you can start to walk further with your dog before rewarding.

Working on teaching your dog to walk with you without the leash will really speed up how quickly they can master the art of walking nicely on their leash. Once your dog has mastered the skill of walking with you without a leash, you can then introduce the leash and follow the training steps again in a quiet environment.

Reward Check-in while on the move

One of the easiest ways to improve your dog's walking skills and general focus when out and about is to reward them for checking in.

This means that every time your dog looks at you voluntarily, you're going to mark and reward them with something they love.

The goal is to have your dog periodically look at you, but shouldn't be about building constant eye contact. Just a check-in.

TEACHING THE WALKING POSITION

Figure Eight Walk

Once you've taught your dog the position you would like them to walk in, you can start to develop their skills further.

Walking in figure eights can help your dog to practice turning with you whilst remaining on a loose leash throughout. As you walk, you reward your dog when the leash is slack.

Start by setting out two objects to walk around in a quiet area.

By walking in figure eights, you will be able to practice turning away from and towards your dog. If they turn with you, mark and reward.

If your dog starts to pull forward or back, stop moving and encourage them back to your side before continuing.

When your dog is getting good at this, you can practice using obstacles you find on your walks, such as planters, trees or even bike racks.

Not only are you building excellent walking skills, but you're teaching your dog to ignore the objects you're moving around and building up their confidence in novel situations.



LOOSE LEASH WALKING USING 300 PECK

A simple way to teach your dog to walk in a position is using 300 peck.

Start with your dog beside you on a loose lead. Take one step forward and if the lead remains loose, reward. Then take two steps. If the lead remains loose throughout, reward again. Build up a step at a time.

If the lead tightens at any point, stop moving and reset the game. Restart your count from one, before building up again a step at a time.

The only thing that matters is whether the lead is loose. Your dog can be slightly in front of you, slightly behind, on your left or right, looking at you or sniffing - if they are on a slack lead always reward after your target number of steps.

Be patient. You will probably find that it takes a while to build up to ten consecutive steps with your dog on a loose lead. Don't feel frustrated as each time you start over your dog has the chance to get reinforced more often and this helps to strengthen the behavior you want.

Over time you will be able to take more and more steps between rewards and your dog will walk beautifully on a loose lead throughout. As the numbers build, progress will get quicker, but no matter what number you're on, if the lead tightens, you must start again from one.

Be consistent with this approach and you will quickly make progress. When you and your dog reach 300 steps without the lead tightening, you have mastered loose lead walking!



READING CANINE BODY LANGUAGE

Learning your dog's body language will help you see what your dog is telling you well before they have to shout by barking, lunging or growling!

Dogs communicate their discomfort in many subtle ways. Consider what your dog does before they overreact?

Does their mouth go from open to closed?

Do their ears get tall and forward?

Does the tail go high up or is there a change in how they walk?

Body language is like a sentence, specific body parts are words but the whole body tells the story.

Seeing how your dog communicates with their body can be a game changer when it comes to resolving reactivity.

important a dog's body language is. It is a quiet, polite communication but if you notice it, your dog may not have to shout, "please stop!"



BODY LANGUAGE- HEAD TURNS



Let's look at the head turn as an example.

If your dog turns their head and averts their eyes to the left or right yet the rest of the body remains stationary, this is saying, "I need a break for a minute." Stop whatever you are doing and wait for your dog to turn their head forward again before continuing.



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When they dip their head very low and sideways, they may be communicating fear and concern.

When your dog is on alert they might face forward and hold their head high - perhaps they hear or smell something?



If your dog turns their head and their upper body follows to go and enjoy a good sniff, that's fantastic. This is a nice cut-off signal that says, "I am not a threat" and your dog might use this behavior to diffuse a situation that they are finding stressful.

BODY LANGUAGE- MOVEMENT

How your dog moves can tell you a lot.

Slowing down helps your dog to process what's up ahead and stopping can give them the time they need to think. However, stopping may not be enough to help your dog relax. If they have stopped and are looking for longer than a few seconds, prompt them to interrupt and move on. If they are still fixated and staring intensely, this is a clear warning that your dog's stress level is rising and you need to help them move right away.

Your dog may move towards something they can sniff instead of moving directly towards a trigger. This helps them relax and is good to encourage.

When your dog is over-reacting they may also try to move towards the trigger. This often seems confusing - why would your dog want to get closer to something that scares them? But often this is your dog's attempt to make the scary thing move away and create more space for themselves.

If your dog starts to increase their speed towards something you know they are worried about, slow them down to a stop and help them move in any direction other than forward.

When you see your dog slowing down on their own, moving in arcs, stopping, backing up, or changing direction, you can be confident that they are choosing safety over danger. They are making great choices, so support them by moving with them every time.

Your dog might make curvy movements or move in a large arc when getting close to something they are unsure of. This helps to create more time and space for them to process things.



CHOOSING THE RIGHT ENVIRONMENT

As your dog becomes more skilled at walking on a loose leash, you will want to take your new skills on the road.

Choose the places you progress your training to carefully. Remember, we want your dog to succeed, so take it slowly.

When you arrive at your location, give your dog some time to relax into their surroundings before you start training.

When you first arrive, go on a sniffari together. A sniffari is a walk which is led by your dog's nose! This will give your dog a chance to investigate the environment, relax, and acclimatize. A longer leash works best for this.

This helps to settle excitable dogs and also boosts confidence in dogs who are more reserved.

When you see your dog's body language softening and their movements become calmer, you can see if your dog is ready to move onto loose leash walking training.



USING THE ENVIRONMENT

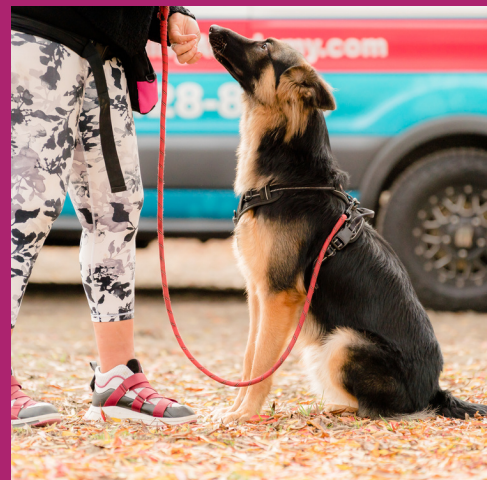
While out on a walk, there may be things that appear unexpectedly. When these sudden changes occur, the environment can be a great source of help to keep your dog safe and prevent them from overreacting.

If you find a trigger is getting too close to you and your dog, look for things that can help block the view. You might be able to move behind a larger object such as a trash can or parked car while the trigger passes. Reinforce your dog for staying with you until it's safe to move on again.

Using an alley, driveway or other open area can help create the space your dog needs. You can also keep your dog's focus by doing other behaviors together such as fun tricks.

A row of bushes or a tree can be a great spot to encourage your dog to spend time sniffing instead of reacting to triggers.

No matter where you are when you encounter a trigger, there will likely be things in the environment that you can proactively use to help keep your dog safe. Sometimes all you need is a little imagination.





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Have a dog training question?
Call now and book a
FREE phone consultation

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