

LOOSE LEAD WALKING

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START ENJOYING YOUR WALKS AS MUCH AS YOUR DOG DOES

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What is loose lead walking?

Simple! Walking along with us with a slack lead. Think of your lead as an emergency brake, it is not there to be used all the time, it is just there to stop your dog getting into trouble.

Your dog can be on either side of you, just ahead or just behind, it does not matter, so long as there is a nice loose lead and you are comfortable.

The easiest way to tell if your lead has enough slack is that the clip from the collar/harness will be hanging down and there should be a nice dip in the lead between your dog and you



Rather like this

So why do our dogs pull?

Well that is pretty simple to answer... pretty much because they can!

Dogs drag us down the path for these main reasons



To get to or away from somewhere, someone or something that they want, whether that is the park, the woods, their best friend, a discarded kebab from someone's late-night poor decision or a nasty looking tissue on the ground. If they want it, what is stopping them from getting it? Not a bit of material attaching them to you that's for sure.

(You try holding me back from Gary Barlow with a bit of string and see how that works out!)

Dogs are naturally quicker than us, they want to get going, which means that very quickly they feel pressure on the lead. As they feel this pressure they will naturally pull against it, as it is restricting them. You may pull a little more, they may pull a little more and "Hey Presto!" you have your own game of Tug-of-War. In dog training, this is called the **opposition reflex** #nerdalert



We are good and obedient humans who do our dogs bidding and we **follow** them. They have trained us well to get what suits them the most. That is fine, we all do the same thing..."Mum! I'm thirsty and tired" - cue big sad wide eyes so we do not have to move from in front of the TV, or whatever your bargaining chip was as a child.

How can you stop your pulling pup?

First, there are three Foundation Exercises to practise.



Hand Touch

This is a nice simple exercise that helps to build more value around you and helps to create focus around distractions (of which there are plenty outside your living room).

First, place a treat between your middle and ring finger, this is to help guide your dog to your hand, your dog does NOT get this treat.

As your dog investigates the tempting smell from between your fingers, say "yes" and give them a treat from your other hand.

Continue this way until your dog is happily touching their nose to your hand all the time. Once you are at this stage you can remove the reward.

With the reward no longer between your fingers, as your dog touches your palm with their nose, carry on as normal with a "yes" and give them their well-deserved reward.

Do not progress the exercise too quickly, as your dog may not understand and you do not want them to fail. If your dog does struggle, go back a step and make it easier for them. Super strong foundations will help you more in the long run.





Orientation towards you

So, this is super easy to start teaching, get a good collection of treats and be ready to go.

With your dog in front of you just start dropping treats, one after the other. Do not wait for your dog to do anything, just drop another.

After approximately ten treats just stop your heavenly deposits and see what your dog does.

Well, they will look to you wondering where the wonderful supply of flavoured rain has gone.

As your dog looks to you, say "yes" and reward, be generous, give them a couple of treats to show that looking at you is more rewarding than the odd one that is dropped from above.

Repeat this exercise and progress it by starting to reduce the number of random treats dropped and increase the number of times your dog is rewarded for looking at you. Your dog will soon learn that looking at you is rewarding.



As before, do not progress the exercise too quickly as your dog may not understand and you don't want them to fail. If your dog does struggle, go back a step and make it easier for them. Super strong foundations will help you more in the long run.



Follow the Leader

This exercise should be as fun and fast as you can make it.

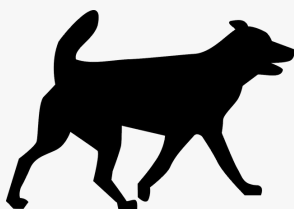
Load yourself with treats and move around excitedly. As your dog follows you, drop a treat on the floor by your feet.

By dropping the treat at your feet you are building value closer to you.

Keep moving around in all sorts of directions, left, right, backwards and forwards. Have lots of fun with this, your dog will want to play the game where you are dropping treats as you move around.

You are their own personal interactive toy, so get moving and start dispensing. Your dog will only want to be around you if it is worth it to them, so start building value in YOU.

TOP TIP: Do this exercise with fun in mind, if you are not fun your dog will have no motivation to stay with you. Dropping the food to the ground stops dogs jumping up or reaching for your hand to stop any attempts at mouthing with excitement at the game.



Proof your foundations

Proofing is a way of saying, testing and improving on a behaviour, which is where the 3Ds come in.

The 3Ds add up to the overall D of DIFFICULTY

Distance
Distraction
Duration

Any situation will be more or less challenging depending on your dog but, for example, asking your dog to do a behaviour without much distraction should be easy. However, if you add distance and duration to the same behaviour, can your dog still succeed?

By amending the 3Ds we can really start to build behaviours that we can rely on.

You can raise one D and lower the other two. You may raise two and really lower one, the ways to utilise the 3Ds are endless, but practising behaviours in different environments and situations will help your dog to really understand what it is you want, and also will help build a behaviour that will last a lifetime.

One of the best things to do is to monitor your 3Ds so that you can easily remember where you were at your previous training session.

If I know that my dog can do a behaviour 90% of the time (so nine out of ten times) then I know that I am ready to move to the next level.

It is not essential to use a chart like this, but it can help, I have added some blank sections so you can add in your own training information. You should do this for each of the behaviours in this book.

Proof your foundations

Can your dog do a behaviour nine out of ten times? If so, increase the difficulty by adding a **D**

[illegible]

Take your time

Whether you have a new puppy, a junior or a golden oldie you must take your time with any training exercise to ensure that your dog is successful.

If you rush through the foundations and the proofing too quickly, then your dog will not understand the behaviour fully, which will cause failure for your dog and frustration for both of you.

Consistency is VITAL

Whoever is walking your dog MUST stick to the training, whether that is a family member a friend or anyone else.

If they don't, it will have a negative impact on your training and, in some cases, may lead to a training issue that you cannot resolve. This is because if rewards are received RANDOMLY it creates VERY strong behaviours.

This includes rewards the dog awards him/herself - pulling and getting that dirty tissue is self-rewarding and if this is allowed to happen when someone else walks your dog, it will reinforce the very behaviour you are trying to address.

Therefore, you need to be sure of what your dog finds rewarding. Moving forwards to get to something is rewarding. Pulling away from something that worries them is rewarding as the scary thing goes further away.

If a behaviour is not improving or getting worse, then you need to think...

What's in it for my dog?

Your dog will only do a behaviour if it is rewarding for them. If you are having a problem with a behaviour and you can establish where the reward is, you can make tracks to changing how your dog is getting that reward.

The Ministry of Funny Walks

Please do these exercises carefully and in suitable locations for yours and your dogs safety

Part 1 - Walking Backwards

With your dog in front of you and rewards to hand, start walking backwards. As your dog follows you, either feed your dog from your hand or drop a reward on the floor. Practise walking backwards indoors so that your dog is learning to follow you. Once your dog has the idea then you can start to practise this in other locations, being safe and sensible, do not try this anywhere where either of you could trip, fall or get into mischief.

Part 2 - Walking Sideways

Exactly the same as part one, but this time you are going to sidestep, your dog remains in the same position...following you. Throughout this training your dog doesn't have to change their position at all, it is YOU that is changing your orientation to them, that's all. The following and rewarding close to you increases the value in being next to you. You should again practise this at home until you and your dog are comfortable with the movement. When you are ready, try it outside where it is safe to do so.

Part 3 - Walking Forwards

Once you and your dog have mastered these first two ways of walking, it is just a small change in foot placement to start walking forwards, and then you are ready to go.

Keep it fun and interesting, mix and match whether you are walking backwards, sideways or forwards. You may feel like everyone is looking at you in a strange way for a few weeks, but they will soon be looking at you in envy with your perfect pooch.

Rewards

When it comes to rewarding your dog, it is vital that you are giving them an appropriate reward for the situation.

For example, if you were always being fed your favourite food, then at some point it is going to lose its value and something else will become more interesting.

Therefore, it is important to know not only what rewards your dog likes, but how much they like it. For example, if you are practising in a quieter environment or one that your dog is comfortable with, then use a lower value reward. But bring out the high-value rewards the areas that are more exciting to your dog.

For example, you could use their meal when you are practising at home, but get out the super favourite reward at the park.

If you know that your dog is not keen on something (dogs have preferences just like us) don't use it as a reward. If you are given something you don't like for a job well done, are you likely to do a good job again? No!

So make sure that you know what your dog likes and LOVES, use the right reward for the right situation.

Remember, rewards do not always have to be food, they could be:

- Squeaky Toy
- Tennis Ball
- Sniffing the ground
- Playing catch

If your dog likes it, it is a reward.

Collar or Harness

This is always a debate that is a bit like the love or hate of a certain spread.

Collar or harness, harness or collar.

There are pros and cons to each piece of equipment, the main thing is to use equipment that you and your dog are comfortable with.

Collars are convenient as your dog may wear one all the time, they are also useful to have the identification tag on - which is a legal requirement (except in some cases) - when your dog is outside.

If your dog already wears a collar and is prone to pulling, this could cause and injury, especially if they also lunge. Any amount of pressure, applied in the same area, over an extended period of time will cause damage. For some breeds, collars are not suitable as you do not want anything else restricting airways.

Harnesses are not something your dog can wear all day long and require you to do some preparation work to ensure that your dog is happy wearing one before they go for a walk - this is called conditioning. Harnesses do not stop pulling, they just help to take the pressure off your dog's neck.

The best harness to get is one that doesn't restrict any part of your dog's movement and one that has a D-ring to attach the lead on the chest and the back. This helps to give you more control if your dog does pull you.

No matter what you decide is best for you and your dog, any piece of equipment can be used incorrectly and cause injury, it is about conditioning your dog to the equipment and training your dog with it.

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About the author

From a young age, Jo has been passionate about animals. As a child, she kept a wide range of pets including, hamsters, guinea pigs, rabbits and even stick insects.

When she was older, her focus turned to dogs and horses, but following a nasty riding accident in her early 20s, she decided to focus solely on dogs and began helping at local puppy training classes.

During this time she spent many hours roaming the countryside with her faithful Labrador, Max. After realising that there was no other job that she would rather do, Jo began her own business based in the heart of West Sussex.

Over the years, she has worked with hundreds of dogs and trained their owners using her positive reinforcement training methods in a fun and engaging way.

Jo is accredited by the Institute of Modern Dog Trainers (IMDT) and the Kennel Club (KCAI). She is qualified to teach all levels of agility from foundations to high-level competition. In addition, she is an IMDT examiner assessing future canine professionals, an approved Kennel Club agility judge, a podcast host and a published author.

Jo currently has four dogs, which are all trained in agility, scentwork and trick training. Jo has competed at the highest level in agility across the country and even at Crufts.