



Resource sheet: Let's go for a walk!

Paw Prints

It's important to teach your dog to enjoy walking on lead, even if you live in an area where the dog doesn't generally go on lead walks. Start now and life will be easier later.

If your dog is nervous about the lead, let him/her drag it around the house/yard under supervision a few times a day, and make sure s/he is having fun while doing it (use toys, treats, play, etc).

Be careful to never pull or drag your dog on the lead, or to allow children to yank or pull on the lead. This will make your dog's lead training much more difficult.

Set reasonable expectations

Lead manners are hard for your dog. Dogs sit, lie down and run to each other as part of their natural behavior. When was the last time you saw a dog leading another dog around on a lead?

Allow at least two weeks of consistent work to see real progress toward polite lead manners. Don't try for a perfect "Heel" for the entire walk – it's boring for the dog and hard work for you. In fact, unless you plan to compete in obedience trials, you really only need a good enough Heel to get your dog past a distraction on the sidewalk.

Your dog's daily walks are important times for the dog to get out and enjoy the neighbourhood. Encourage your dog to get his/her nose on the ground. Leash manners are simply to keep your dog from pulling your arm out of its socket, not to have your dog in a perfect "Heel" all the time.

Play "follow me"

Your dog will learn lead manners a lot faster if you **teach her what you want, instead of waiting for her to make a mistake and then punishing her**. How do you do this? Train her by setting up situations where she can be rewarded for doing the right thing.

First, practice walking by your side off-lead in a safe area, if possible. If not, then **use at least a six-foot lead and let it hang loosely at all times** (tying it to your belt loop works well). Use a standard buckle collar – NOT a choke chain or prong collar.

Start walking, and encourage your dog to keep up by saying her name, "pup-pup-pup", patting your leg, etc. When she catches up, give a treat and then head off in another direction, encourage following again, and treat when she is beside you. Keep your hands off the lead to avoid the temptation to "reel the dog in" (she's a dog, not a fish) – use talking and treats as encouragement.

If the dog starts getting ahead of you, turn and walk in the opposite direction – now the dog is behind you! Encourage him to catch up. This will teach the dog to pay attention to what you are doing when he is on lead. Do 3 or 4 short sessions a day and always end on a successful note.

After about a week, add some structure. Put your dog on lead and walk around the yard, weaving around things (trees, chairs, etc.). Do lots of turns, both away from and toward the dog. When you turn toward the dog, make sure he is slightly behind you so that you "cut off" his path by walking in front of him, but don't step on him or trip over the lead. This is called a body block and works well for getting attention. When you turn away from the dog, encourage him to catch up – pat your leg, talk to the dog, offer a treat, etc. **Make it your goal to never let the dog "hit the end of the lead"**.

Create a "sweet spot"

Grab a handful of treats and try to master the skill of holding them next to your leg as a lure for the dog to follow, giving her one treat at a time while saying "good dog" if she is walking nicely next to you. This is a great exercise for dogs who love food but find it hard to concentrate on you when they are distracted. It will **teach your dog that being next to you is a great place to be.**

Simon says "sit"

Many dogs sabotage their own lead training by bursting to the end of the lead as soon as you walk outside. It's hard to get your dog's attention, which is critical for good lead manners, when he repeatedly launches himself away from you.

To get your dog off to a good start, **try a simple routine of taking one step (only ONE or it won't work properly!) and then asking the dog to sit.** If he doesn't sit right away, that's OK, just wait. Don't pull back on the lead, don't ask for "sit-sit-sit" repeatedly, and don't wave food at him. Just stand there and admire the view.

Once he sits (even if it takes 5 minutes of waiting!), say "good dog" and give a treat. Then take ONE step, and ask for a sit. If you treat it as a game, your dog will quickly pick up on what he has to do to get that treat. By about the third or fourth time, he'll probably be waiting for you to ask. If he doesn't want food for his efforts, that's OK, just say "good dog!" and take another step quickly. Then you are using movement as a reward, which is what he wants (to keep going).

Once your dog is reliably sitting as soon as you take one step, then start taking two steps and asking for a sit, and so on. **This will help you teach your dog to sit quickly on walks, so if he is getting excited it gives you an easy way to calm him down.**

Avoid training a sled dog

If your dog is pulling a lot at the lead, work more in the back yard on lead manners and "follow me" games, and then gradually work up to getting out more in the neighborhood. This allows your dog to practice lead manners in a quiet environment before coping with the temptations of great smells, cheeky squirrels and neighbor dogs.

Try as hard as you can not to pull back on the lead when the dog pulls forward – pulling back will actually train your dog to pull harder since it stimulates his muscles to pull in the opposite direction.

Plant your feet and stop walking if necessary, but DON'T use the lead to reel in your dog. Once your dog stops pulling (usually to walk back to you to see why you stopped walking), say "good!" and immediately start walking. If you have good timing, your dog will realise that you started walking when the lead was loose, and you stopped walking when it was tight.

The lead is not a tug toy

If your dog is biting the lead or using it as a tug toy, try spraying or wiping a bad-tasting substance on the lead. Commercially available sprays like Bitter Apple™ have a bitter flavor and discourage dogs from licking or chewing at anything you spray them on. Or try vinegar, Tabasco™ sauce or cayenne pepper. Also, as soon as your dog chomps the lead, stop walking and ignore him/her until she/he drops it. As soon as she drops it, say "good!" and start walking immediately.

Scratch 'n' sniff

If your dog is constantly stopping to sniff things on walks, then you may need a better balance between your control over the walk and your dog's need to explore her environment. First, remember your dog's walks are important times for her to get out and enjoy the neighborhood, and sniffing is an important part of that exploration.

If you are constantly pulling your dog's nose off the ground to continue the walk, she will progressively become more determined to get to the next tree or rock, pulling harder each time. Let her sniff — sniffing is very relaxing for dogs. Then, once your dog has finished sniffing a spot, as she looks up, say "let's go" and call your dog over to you to continue the walk. This preserves your control over things while allowing your dog to get in a bit of doggie therapy.

Over time you will be able to prompt your dog to stop sniffing by saying "let's go", since she will have learned that it means "time to move on". This will allow you to balance your need to keep moving on walks with your dog's need to explore her environment with her nose.

Take a break

Incorporate at least one 5-minute settle in the middle of each walk. This will relax both you and your dog, and teach your dog that there's more to walks than pulling you along. Find a quiet spot, attach your dog's lead securely to a tree, move a few steps away from her so that she can't jump on you if she becomes frustrated, and sit down. Watch the birds and take a 5-minute time out. Ignore your dog until she is behaving calmly. Talk to her quietly and praise her when she is settling nicely. After each settle period, see if her lead manners improve.

Accessorizing: head collars

If your dog is still having lots of trouble walking properly on lead, then you may want to consider special equipment. Regardless of what you choose, keep in mind that training equipment is just that: equipment to be used as part of an overall training program. You'll still need to use training techniques described above; equipment may make it easier for your dog to understand.

"Head collars" are designed to help train dogs out of pulling on the lead. The most popular brands are Gentle Leader and Haltie. They need to be properly fitted and you need to spend a little time getting your dog used to one. Talk to your vet for advice and help in fitting/training the collar.

Don't fall into the trap of thinking a choke chain or prong collar will stop lead pulling. For dogs who are already having problems pulling at the lead, choke chains and prong collars merely teach your dog to cope with increasing levels of pain — nearly all dogs who currently pull on the lead will pull just as hard on those collars, and suffer in the form of neck and throat injuries.

Harnesses can help prevent neck/throat injury, but they are actually one of the best tools used to train sled dogs to pull loads, so they **may not be the best tool for use in untraining a pulling habit unless you use a special no-pull harness, called an "Easy Walker" harness, and are also using some of the training techniques described above.**

When my dog is on lead, I'm training him

Probably the most important thing to remember when doing lead training is that ANY TIME your dog is on lead, he is TRAINING to walk nicely on lead. If you work on lead training while you walk in the park, but then your dog drags you out the door toward the car, he is learning that lead manners are optional. Before you clip on that lead, take a deep breath and muster your patience to do some work with your dog. A little planning and consistency goes a long way. **Grab those treats, put a smile on your face and off we go!**