

Walking Nicely On Lead

Puppies and dogs can understandably get excited when they're out for walks, and there's lots of fun things going on that they're keen to explore! We need to show them how to walk calmly on the lead to ensure that their owner is safe from being pulled over.

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. Teaching your dog to walk with a loose lead takes a great deal of patience and time, but it's worth it!

Equipment

A quick internet search will reveal a vast range of equipment marketed as a 'cure' for pulling. Unfortunately, some equipment causes pain or discomfort when the dog pulls by causing tension in a sensitive area. This is unnecessary and can be unpleasant and confusing for your dog.

Ideally, walk your dog using whatever piece of equipment is most comfortable for them (such as 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, such as a front attaching harness.

Teaching your dog to walk nicely on the lead

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

- 🐾 **Step 1:** The second the lead starts to tighten, stop walking. Simply stand still, keep quiet and don't move forward again until the lead is slack, then walk on. Don't jerk the lead back or tell your dog off – just stand and wait, calmly and quietly. If your dog does not turn back to you, try walking a couple of steps in the opposite direction to get their focus back.
- 🐾 **Step 2:** Reward your dog whenever they are walking next to you on a loose lead. Keep some treats handy but out of the way (e.g. 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.
- 🐾 **Step 3:** Initially practise in quiet areas. Walk 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.



Be consistent each time you go out with your dog – this may take time but will be well worth the effort! You should expect walks to take longer while your dog is learning, but if you stick with it the result will be enjoyable walkies with a calm, happy dog who no longer pulls and is a pleasure to walk.

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, 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. Be aware it's likely to take your dog longer to learn to stop pulling with this method!

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.
- ❗ When your dog is in the right position the lead should always be hanging loose with no tension.
- ❗ Don't punish your dog when they pull by telling them off or pulling them back, as they need to feel safe and happy by your side. Rewarding the right behaviour is much more effective!
- ❗ Try to be consistent each time you walk with your dog.



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Your nearest Dogs Trust Dog School Team are also happy to help and can be contacted via: www.dogstrustdogschool.org.uk

The advice contained in this handout is of a general nature and is no substitute for specific behavioural or veterinary advice. If you are worried about your dog, then do consult your vet.