



How to Get Your Dog to Stop Pulling on the Leash

Does your dog pull you around whenever you take him on a walk? Does your intended peaceful stroll around the block often turn into an embarrassing or frustrating trek that can't end soon enough? If your dog makes walking a nightmare, whether it's because he constantly tugs on the leash to smell everything in his path or goes crazy whenever he passes another living creature, it's time to make a change in your dog's behavior and his perception of what a walk should be like.

Don't let your dog's poor behavior prevent you from taking him on walks. Instead, follow these steps to help you establish a clear relationship with your dog, making your life easier.

If you follow the plan, you'll be walking your dog in no time (instead of your dog walking you).

Take a Closer Look at the Problem

First, let's look at the underlying issue. Grab your dog, a leash, and hit the sidewalk. As you start your walk, without giving your dog a command like "heel," let out the leash so it's loose, and see what happens. Giving your dog the full length of the leash, also known as loose-leash walking, will tell you what your dog thinks of you, relative to the world around him.

Does your dog try to drag you all over the neighborhood?

Does he run up to every object, animal, or person you pass?

Does he ignore your every command while he's outside?

If the answer to these questions is yes, then your dog doesn't look to you as his leader when he's outside. He's directly interacting with the world instead of using you as his interpreter. He's not looking to you for guidance on where to walk, what to approach or avoid, or the speed at which to move; he likely views you as more of a hindrance than anything, working against his desire to move faster and explore all the interesting things he finds!



Leash pulling indicates a dog's lack of awareness of or interest in his owner while on a walk.

The Solution

Teach your dog to become aware of you and look to you for leadership and guidance during a walk. You can do this by practicing loose-leash walking with your dog. Loose-leash walking, opposed to heeling or forcing your dog to walk in a hyper-controlled position, will give your dog more choices. These choices will require him to think about what he's doing and to remain aware of where his owner is at all times.

No matter how much experience my clients or their dogs have, I always start with "loose leash walking" as the first step. This serves as both an assessment for me of what the relationship is like between owner and dog, and as the foundation of training. I always follow the natural learning process: start easily and then incrementally adapt to progressively increase the challenge. The first step is always to begin training the relationship between the dog and his person. My experience has taught me that developing good leadership relationships with our dogs is the foundation of long-term success. That does not mean, however, that we should come down on our dogs like a ton of bricks to show them who's in charge; I've found that most of the time, finessing the leadership in the relationship is more effective.

Teaching Your Dog to Walk on a Loose Leash

You can begin loose-leash training the moment the leash goes on, regardless of whether you're in the backyard, on the sidewalk, or still inside the house. The primary message you want to get across to your dog as you do this is *it's HIS responsibility to keep the leash loose and to remain aware of where you are and what you are doing*. Don't ever let your dog completely forget about you.

Let's Begin.

To begin the training exercise, start walking your dog. Pick up the slack in the leash as your dog gets closer to you and slowly let it out as he moves away.



“Popping” the Leash

Once your dog gets to the end of the leash, give the leash a quick tug (“pop”), and then turn around and walk in the opposite direction. Repeat this process—once you feel tension as your dog gets to the end of the leash (as he walks on ahead of you and pulls), give the leash another pop as you turn around and head in the opposite direction once again. Keep doing this several times until your dog starts to become more aware of you and realizes that you are the one in charge.

Acting Oblivious

Rather than behaving in an assertive or dominating manner, act as though you are oblivious of your dog’s presence. Avoid chitchatting with him, keep your eyes up, and pretend you’re out on a walk by yourself. Keeping your verbal communication with your dog to a minimum will cause him to pay more attention when you speak a command, and keeping your eyes fixed on where you’re going rather than on the dog will make you appear as the leader to him. Don’t be truly oblivious, however; watch the dog closely in your peripheral vision throughout the entire walk.

Keep Goals in Mind

As you practice these techniques, your dog should start to govern his speed. You should notice him beginning to do little head checks as you change direction. He should glance at you to see where you are and where you want him to go next. If your dog begins to do this, praise him by saying “good dog” or “good boy/girl.” You’re praising and “verbally marking” your dog’s decision to voluntarily follow you. Don’t overly praise your dog, however. Keep it simple and short.

Practice Makes Perfect

Keep going through this process: keep the leash loose, change directions, watch for your dog to look at and follow you, and praise him when he does it correctly.

Introducing Distractions

After your dog has this down pretty well, you can begin introducing distractions, such as another person or toy. When additional distractions are added to the equation, your dog will be required to think and decide between obeying you and following his instincts to run up to something and pull on the leash.



Dealing with Distractions

Approach a distraction, and then retreat as soon as your dog's mind goes from attentive to distracted. As soon as your dog begins to separate from you and focus on the distraction object, turn around, pop the leash, and walk in the opposite direction from the distraction. Find the distance at which your dog can be successful. Re-approach and re-retreat until your dog can voluntarily turn and follow you away from the distraction, and then praise your dog the moment he makes that "following" decision. Then you can begin to challenge his awareness of you by moving incrementally closer each time.

Tips

- ❑ **Don't let your dog realize you're keeping track of his every move.** Try to act natural; nonchalantly change directions without looking at your dog. Try to simply glance out of the corner of your eye to keep track of his movement and behavior. You want your dog to follow your leadership on his own without you having to attentively watch his every move.
- ❑ **Don't overly praise your dog.** Just give him enough positive verbal markers to let him know he's doing the right thing.
- ❑ **Do the opposite of what your dog wants to do** while practicing this exercise. Be as contrary as possible. If your dog wants to slow down, you speed up. If he wants to go north, turn around and go south. This will make your dog increasingly more attentive.
- ❑ **Try to cut out verbal commands as much as possible** when you're on a walk. You want your dog to follow and be aware of YOU, not your voice. If you're talking, your dog knows you're there without having to look back at you. Let the simple tug on the leash be your main form of communication.



Does this exercise really work? **SEE for yourself!**

If you learn better by watching, rather than reading a step-by-step description, check into **The Dog's Way Video Training Course**. In lesson one, Sean covers this very process and works with three separate dog owners, teaching them the steps we've covered in this article. The video course demonstrates many variations of loose-leash walking exercises with different types of dogs. See for yourself what it looks like when REAL people work through the lesson with their dogs! [**CLICK HERE!**](#)



You may notice a difference in your dog's behavior very quickly after you start practicing this exercise. This doesn't mean your dog is instantly trained and will act like an angel the next time you take him out for a walk. Training takes repetition. If you keep practicing and experimenting with this, it will become more and more natural for your dog, and you should see a huge difference in his long-term behavior.

As you practice this, you and your dog will become better at walking together and communicating. More importantly though, this is the beginning of establishing a clear relationship with your dog that may not have existed before. Once your dog taps into his natural ability to follow a leader and realizes that you are the one in charge on a walk, all other training begins to get easier. Using this loose-leash walking technique as a foundational "relationship clarification" tool is a great foundation to any training program. This will not only solve leash-pulling problems but could improve your dog's overall behavior.

After you and your dog get this exercise down, your daily walk will no longer be the nightmare it once was. That peaceful, casual stroll around the neighborhood with your dog that you always dreamed of will become a reality.

If you need help with this training exercise or have questions or concerns about your dog's behavior, contact **The Dog's Way. We'd love to hear from you and talk with you about your dog.**



Another GREAT Resource to Complement This Lesson

When you go back into training mode with your dog, it's important to create structure in everyday life to clarify your relationship with him. Our eBook, **How to Start Off Right with Your Newly Adopted Dog**, was written to help people create structure in their homes with newly adopted dogs, but the natural process we talk about and the tips included also apply directly to dogs going back into training mode. You can download this eBook for FREE on our website and apply the tips for creating structure as you experiment with loose-leash walking. This will amplify the effectiveness of your training. *Download the eBook today!*



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PO Box 2855 | Woodinville, WA 98077

Phone: (888) 959-3647 | TheDogsWay.com | Podcast Call In Line: 1 (844) 364-7929