



Loose Leash Walking

Keys to a successful walk: Keep the leash loose, and keep your dog's attention on you. Your dog should NEVER be in front of you! Make believe there is an imaginary wall that starts at your hip and goes out to each side. Your dog cannot pass through that "wall". If you notice his head start to pass by your hip then he is starting to get ahead of you. Immediately use one of the 4 methods below to regain your status as the walk leader.

Start off your walk with your dog sitting to the side you'd like him to walk on. (I will use left side for illustrating the examples below, but feel free to walk your dog on the right). Most people have their dog walk on the left, but that is up to you. Either side is fine as long as when you ask your dog to walk on that side, they don't switch sides on their own.

When you are ready to walk use the command "let's go", "let's walk", or "heel". Whatever word(s) your like are fine, just stay consistent and use the same word(s) to mean the same exercise.

Say the positive word marker "YES", **EVERYTIME** your dog does the behavior you want. On your walk, you should say a "yes" every time he is at your side with a loose leash and attention on you. "Yes", marks the very moment he is in the right place on the walk and it's great feedback for him so he knows what you want him to do. "Yes" will mean to him, "that's what my person likes and something good is coming to me". After saying "yes", vary your rewards. Use food treats, toys, a ball, a pet in the place your dog loves most, voice praise and of course, a smile. Any or all the above work as praise for your dog. Pick what your dog likes most. In general, treats, verbal praise and petting work wonderfully. Say "yes" each time your dog is doing the right thing, give him a nice pet and reward with a treat. The more you vary your rewards, the better your dog will respond to the positive word marker "YES" because you will always peak his interest since he won't know if he's getting a yummy treat or a pet or a chance to play ball.

Start off in the beginning using healthy treats with your dog hungry so you entice him to work harder on learning his loose leash walk. Make sure your body language stays the same whether you have treats with you or not. If you hold a treat a certain way or always try to lure your dog with a treat he might learn to not work on his loose leash walk unless you have a treat in your hand. So remember the positive word marker and great body language!

Now in a perfect world, you have started your walk, your dog is at your side, not pulling, so you are marking that moment with the positive word marker “yes”, your dog is looking at you and you are intermittently giving him a treat with praise for being behind your hip. But we know that isn’t what is going to happen....at least not yet. We know your dog will attempt getting ahead of you. So, just stay committed and patient and DO NOT let your dog pull or get ahead of you. The second your dog begins to get ahead of you use one of these 4 techniques:

1. Stop:

Just that, stop walking. Don’t talk or look at your dog. Just wait patiently. Hold your ground, hang onto the leash and eventually your dog will get it that he can’t make you move where he wants to go. He will either walk back to your side since he received some positive experiences there such as the “Yes” and some treats earlier, or he will just give up and you will get some slack in the leash. As soon as either of those things happens, then you can resume your walk again. Note: you need patience for this, it could be quite awhile before your dog settles. Be patient.

2. Turn Into Your Dog:

If your dog is on your left, use your left leg and step toward your dog (step left, with your left leg). Make sure to do this before he gets ahead of you. Basically, you are walking a big circle to your left with your left leg walking toward your dog on the left and ahead of his head. This teaches your dog to look up at your leg and pay attention to you because your leg will cross in front of him if he starts to try to get ahead of you. Dogs are masters of body language and really get it when you take their space. Your dog will slow down and stay behind your leg. Make sure to tell him “yes” when he does this and praise him!

3. Backup:

Take 5 to 10 giant steps backward as soon as your dog gets passed the imaginary wall that is out from your hip. Your momentum walking backward will cause him to stop pulling and will make him turn around and face you. Make sure not to try to pull the leash with just your arms. Keep walking calmly backward, your dog will eventually follow, then as he is walking toward you, move the leash over to the side of your body that he was on, but continue to walk backward don’t stop yet. As soon as your dog is over to the left side of your body, step directly toward your dog, but to the side of his head so that you end up walking right past him and he has to turn around and follow you. He will end up walking with you on the side of your body that you want. Once again you are making it clear that when he goes ahead of you, you leave and you only continue walking straight ahead on your terms, not his.

4. Change Direction:

Immediately change the direction you are walking when your dog starts to get ahead of you. You can turn 180 degrees and go the other way, or just turn in a different direction away from your dog. This teaches your dog that he has to pay attention to you because who knows when you might leave and go another direction. It puts the responsibility on the dog to watch you, the Pack Leader. Pack Leaders always lead their pack! It also teaches him that if he tries to pull you into the direction he wants to go that the opposite actually happens, so he'd better just follow you.

Body language is very important to your dog. Doing exercises that utilize your body language like "leave it" and "wait" are excellent exercises to do before, after and during your walk. The Find It Game and The Watch Me Game are also excellent games to play to build rapport between you and your dog.

Remember:

Have fun! Be Patient!! And Practice, Practice, Practice!!!

More Loose Leash Walking Tips

Walking: Remember to walk fast enough that your dog doesn't get bored. Change up your pace, be fun! Practice about-turns and U turns/turning into your dog. With about turns, the dog is on the outside of you and you continue on the same line. With u-turns, you turn into your dog, giving your dog a treat behind you as you turn. Be consistent and never allow your dog to pull.

Turn into your dog OR U-Turn: With this turn, you walk around the dog (e.g. the dog is on the inside of your turn). Hold the treat at the dog's nose, behind your hip and walk around the front of him. If your dog is on your left your turn on your left leg.

Turn away from your dog OR About Turn: With this turn, as your dog gets a bit ahead of you, you immediately turn away from your dog (so if your dog is on the left side you turn to the right). Your dog ends up walking around you and should get back to a heel position. Be sure that your feet keep moving. Reward your dog when he is looking up at you, with a loose leash, at your hip

Heeling: When walking your dog see how many steps of attention you can get up to. If for example you can take 3 steps and your dog looks at you the entire time then reward your dog on the third step. Do this a few times. Then you will increase the amounts of steps you do with your dog looking up at you. For instance, go from 3 steps to 5 steps of walking while your dog focuses on you. Do this at least 5 times in a row, when your dog gets that then increase to 7 or 10 steps. Once your dog starts doing well at this number then increase it again to maybe 10-15 steps. Vary your reward. Once in awhile reward for shorter distances/less steps, just for fun.