

PULLING ON THE LEAD: LOOSE LEAD WALKING AND HEEL

The theory behind the loose lead walking is that if a dog pulls on the lead it is a reward to move forward, therefore it is important that you don't allow your dog to pull you forward when they pull on the lead (As the dog is getting what it wants by pulling, not walking nicely).

Each time he/she pulls forward on the lead you need to stop walking. It is helpful if you are prepared to stop walking by watching the tension within the lead. As you see the lead go tight prepare yourself to stop (This gives much faster and more accurate feedback). There is no need to say anything as you stop walking. When the lead relaxes you can walk on. Eventually he / she will realise that pulling on the lead is not rewarded.

Now, you're thinking; but I'm not going to get very far and how on earth do I exercise my dog?

2 options (plus more instruction below): When using a short lead you could change directions when he/she pulls on the lead. This way you can keep moving and exercise your dog without allowing him/her to pull you forward. I find this works well, especially since a dog is usually pulling towards something so by walking away it removes the reward; when the dog is walking nicely you can head back in the original direction.

The 2nd option is to use a long lead for exercise walks (eg 5meters) or even better; have a solid recall so you can have your dog off lead. Long leads are risky to use when around other dogs and people due to the risk of getting tangled. Also pups can build up speed and have a nasty shock when they get to the end of the lead or are pulled back & this could cause injury. It's best to wait until your dog has improved on lead before using an extendable lead. Unless it is a good quality lead and you use a different harness or collar then you may delay your dog's progress if you allow them to pull forward.

Loose lead walking and 'Heel'

To build on the loose lead walking is the heel command: the heel command will encourage your dog to walk alongside of you.

To start with the heel command, have your dog walking on the lead at your left side (this is usually the side away from the traffic). With a treat (or toy) in your left hand hold it in front your dog to help to lure him / her in the correct position. I generally hold the lead in my right hand or have the lead over my right wrist and lightly hold it and guide it with my left hand. Do not wrap the lead around your wrist as it can be unsafe if your dog lunges ahead and pulls you off-balance. If your dog jumps up at the treat (or toy) as you are practising the heel command just ignore this, but ensure he/ she cannot take the treat from you. Verbally reward your dog as he/she walks nicely at your side. Occasionally give the treat. The ideal time to reward your dog is when he/she is looking forward or at you and relaxed.

To encourage your dog to walk correctly on the lead it is important to combine the above two techniques. If you are having trouble with this or if your dog is too strong for you then you may wish to look at a walking harness, head collar or training collar (like a limited slip collar). A walking harness (provided it is anti-pull and not a regular harness or car harness) is useful for small to medium dogs and will help you get faster results, however you should still apply the same training techniques. The head collars give good results for large or strong dogs but they take some getting used to & the dog may play up a bit when they are first used. The training collars are useful and easy to use but once again the training still needs to be done to ensure long term results.