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LOOSE LEASH WALKING

One of the most rewarding things about having a dog is taking walks with them – you’re both enjoying nature, exercising, and socializing all in one 30-minute walk. However, many people struggle with walks and eventually give up. With some time and patience, you can teach your dog that walking is about self-control.

1. Obtain a tool to help you manage the pulling while you’re teaching your dog how to walk. I recommend front-fastening harnesses (the leash attaches in the front). These work extremely well to help you teach them how to walk. If your dog is especially strong or dedicated puller, I recommend a head collar such as a Gentle Leader. These take some work to get the dog comfortable wearing it but it gives you excellent control.
2. Use a 6 foot leash to teach walking. Hold the leash so that if the dog is next to you, the leash will be loose between you and the dog. Make sure that it’s not so loose that either of you will get tangled up in it.
3. It doesn’t matter which side your dog is on when you walk. In fact, it’s a good skill if your dog is comfortable walking on both sides. However, within one training session, choose one side and stick to it.
4. For the next few days, concentrate on working with your dog in the house. Get a bunch of treats that your dog really likes, put on their equipment including the leash and take one step anywhere around your house. Stop and wait for your dog to look back to you. In the beginning, this could take a while but be persistent. Once they look at you, give them a treat, praise and pet. Then take another step and repeat the process.
5. Once they are focused on you and can walk with you with the leash loose for a few steps, try walking around the house, rewarding them when they look at you.
6. Next, go outside to your yard and start the process over again.
7. When you can walk on a loose leash around the yard, go outside the yard and start the process again.

What do you do if they do pull? Stop, turn around, walk backwards – in general, be unpredictable but DON’T allow them to move forward if the leash is tight. Teaching loose leash walking requires patience and consistency. If you allow your dog to pull at any point, you’re reinforcing that pulling works. Don’t use the leash to move them into place. This will just create an opposition reflex and then you’ve got a battle. Lure them into place with a treat (for now) and continue on.