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Loose Leash Walking

Why Dogs Pull and How to Get Them to Stop

Behind every dog that pulls on the leash is an owner who allows it. Every time you yank your dog back to you on the leash, or hold on to the leash with a death grip while he chokes from the tension of his collar, he learns to pull just as hard in the opposite direction. Isaac Newton was probably watching a dog on a walk when he came up with the idea that for every action, there's an opposite and equal reaction. Whether out on a walk or standing still, you and your dog should not be yanking each other around.

Here's a step by step on how to achieve a nice leisurely loose leash walk with your dog.

1. Start by putting your dog in a sit at your side. Traditionally we walk our dogs on the left side, so put the leash in your right hand and have your left hand ready to reinforce good behavior with your training treats.
2. If your dog becomes wild and crazy and starts pulling, stop at this point and turn into a statue. Wait as long as it takes for him to settle. When he turns to see why you are doing nothing, move a step or two backwards and when he follows all the way back to your side, reinforce him.
3. When you have his attention, begin your walk again. If he starts to rush off without you, stop and stand like a statue again, and when he turns to you, repeat the process of taking a couple brisk steps backward, and reinforce him when he returns to your side. Then when he is following you attentively, begin to move forward again.
4. Reinforce attention (when he looks at you) and all attempts he makes to keep the leash loose. Put in lots of sits to tell him you are in control of the leash and reinforce the sits.
5. If he charges to the end of his leash again, stop and turn into a statue. Repeat step two above.
6. Continue this procedure for the remainder of your walk. Make no forward progress if the leash is tight. When the leash is loose, you reward your dog and continue walking and giving praise and treats.

Remember, dogs do what works. As soon as he learns that the two of you are not going anywhere until he lightens up on the leash, he will stop pulling. This takes patience, but if you stay consistent you will have a dog that will walk right by your side.

There are also training aids that can help to accelerate leash training. My favorites are covered in the KOHD-TV segment on Training Equipment (at www.kohd.com).

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