

## LOOSE LEASH WALKING

*It can take some time to teach a dog how to walk calmly beside you on leash during walks, but if you stick with it you'll be rewarded with less stressful walks for you and for your pup. Dogs pull on leash because they believe pulling will get them where they want to be, so teaching a dog NOT to pull on leash involves teaching them that walking calmly and not pulling is more rewarding than what they get by pulling. The goal of loose leash walking should be that your dog can successfully walk on leash without pulling hard, but the focus should not be that they do not stray from your side at all/ don't pay attention to the world around them.*

**KEEP IN MIND** that some of the biggest sources of enjoyment of walks for dogs come from getting to smell a lot of different things, so in order for your dog to fully benefit from a walk, it should be enjoyable for them (letting them get to sniff and explore the environment they're walking in) versus forcing them to walk on a tight leash and preventing them from investigating the world around them.

**TEACHING "WATCH ME!":** The first step is to teach your dog to get used to visually checking in with you regularly on walks. Give the command "Watch me!" and make excited, happy sounds. When your dog looks at you, give them a treat! Practice this even when you're not on walks to help reinforce it. Do this often to get your dog used to regularly looking at you. When on walks, get in the habit of doing this when you walk by other dogs or other distractions as well. Bring lots of treats on every walk and continue to give treats even when your dog is good at loose leash walking.

**DO NOT REINFORCE UNWANTED PULLING:** If your dog pulls you in a direction they want to go on a walk and you let them get there, this reinforces that pulling is ok and is a good form of communication to tell you what your dog wants. Your dog doesn't know that you don't like this behavior, because in the end, it results in them getting what they're trying to communicate! Instead of going where your dog pulls you, stop walking and wait for your dog to return to you before continuing forward. This is extremely important to consistently do, and it's equally important to reward their non-pulling behavior like returning to you or stopping pulling. As soon as your dog turns to you or starts to move toward you and the leash has some slack, immediately move toward the place that your dog was pulling in the first place. Continue this pattern and over time, this will teach them that they can get to the exciting places they want to go by keeping a loose leash and staying near you, and that they don't get to go where they want when they are pulling on the leash.

**>>IF YOUR DOG PULLS TOWARDS OTHER PEOPLE OR DOGS:** Follow the same protocol as when your dog is pulling for the walk. Stop moving when they pull, but then once they stop pulling and/or move toward you, let them know they can say hi with a cue like "Ok!" and allow them to greet the dog or person. If your dog continues to pull and doesn't stop, walk them in the other direction and do not stop to greet.

**GIVE LOTS OF TREATS:** Treat your dog often during your walks as a reward whenever they look at you and whenever they walk by your side.

**LET YOUR DOG SNIFF!** It's important to make sure your dog still gets to sniff on walks, even while you're working on training loose leash walking. Just like with other dogs, people, and places, make sure they get to sniff and explore after they check in with you first. If they come to you, you can then release them with a cue like "Ok!" or "Go sniff!" and let them have some time to sniff around and explore.

## **HELPFUL TIPS**

**MAKE SURE YOUR TREATS ARE HIGH VALUE!** When training something new or working on something that can be extra distracting or tough for your dog, make sure to always bring the highest value treats as possible. High value means that your dog will think these treats are extra special and more exciting than their everyday food and treats, and this will make them more likely to get excited over them, more likely to want to work for them, and more likely to remember to do the behavior that gets them rewarded. High value treats involve smelling extra good to dogs as well. Bits of cut up hot dog, cut up string cheese, and boiled, unseasoned chicken breast are all great options.

**CONSISTENCY IS KEY:** Consistency is crucial in training. Always stop when they pull on the leash- this will be frequent at first, but with consistency they will learn that pulling always results in stopping and will begin to adjust their behavior.

**PRACTICE SHORT AND FREQUENT SESSIONS:** Short, frequent training sessions are more effective than long, infrequent ones. Try to keep training sessions positive and enjoyable for both you and your dog.

**GRADUALLY INCREASE DISTRACTIONS:** Start training in a relatively calm area with limited distractions for your dog. As your dog becomes more proficient at loose leash walking, introduce them to more distractions.

**AVOID PUNISHMENT:** Never use harsh corrections or punishments for pulling. Positive reinforcement is a kinder and more effective way to train. Punishments can also create a fear or anxiety associated with the leash and outdoors.

**SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP:** If your dog is having difficulty learning loose leash walking or exhibits challenging behavior, consider consulting a professional dog trainer for expert guidance.