

## Leash Walking 101

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Taking your dog for a walk should be an enjoyable experience for both you and your dog, but walking a dog that pulls you all over the place can be both frustrating and unpleasant. Many people assume that an adult or adolescent dog should innately know proper leash behavior but in fact, it requires some training and a lot of consistency. Many challenges exist outdoors such as new sounds, sights and smells, as well as unfamiliar people, dogs and traffic. If your dog has not been exposed to this environment, it can be overwhelming and overstimulating. Proper leash etiquette can set the tone of your relationship with your dog and does not require extensive obedience training.

First, introduce your dog to its new walking equipment. It may be sufficient to start with your regular martingale or buckle collar, but you may find that you will have better control with a front-clip harness or a head halter such as a Gentle Leader or Head Halti. \*See protocol, "How to fit a Gentle Leader or Head Halti," and note that it may take some time for your dog to be comfortable enough to walk outside with this equipment. You will also need your dog's favorite treats. These treats must be its absolute favorite ones to start with. You can even use small pieces of cheese, chicken or hot dogs if necessary. You will also need a place to put them such as a pouch, bait bag or large pocket and a 5-foot or 6-foot leash.

You only need to teach 3 easy cues to start with: "Let's go," "Free," and "Wait." Your goal is to teach your dog that by responding to your cues, you will allow it to move forward with you or have a loose leash to sniff and explore. You only want to allow these privileges when your dog defers to you by responding when you give a cue. Be consistent, it will pay off in the end.

Start in a quiet place indoors where you can practice without distraction. Pick a side, right or left, for your dog to walk on that is most comfortable for you. If you want your dog to learn to walk on your left side, put your leash in your right hand and bunch up the extra slack like an accordion. Your left hand, the side closest to your dog, will control the tension so that the leash is across your body. You want to make sure there's no pressure on the dog's collar but no extra leash. Reverse this if you want your dog to walk on your right side. Once you're comfortable with this position, you can move on to the following cues. Practice indoors first, then in quiet places outdoors before trying a walk with any distractions.

## Basic Skills

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### LET'S GO

"Let's go" will be used any time you want your dog to walk on your side and move with you. It's best to pick one side that your dog can be trained on.

#### Step 1

Working indoors or in a quiet place outdoors, allow your dog a loose leash to do as it pleases. Have a treat in your left hand bringing it close enough to your dog's nose to get its attention. Once you have your dog's attention, turn to your right as you say "Let's go." Start walking forward with your treat hand behind you to serve as a target for your dog to follow. When it gets to your hand say "Yes," praise your dog and give it the treat for following you. Try not to look back or wait for your dog, but move forward with purpose. Practice several repetitions of this to make sure your dog understands to come to you on the "Let's go" cue.

# Basic Skills

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## Step 2

Still working in a quiet place, fill your pocket or pouch with treats. Decide which side you'd like your dog to walk on and hold a few treats in your hand on that side of your body. Hold your leash in the opposite hand. Say "Let's go" and take a few steps forward with your treat hand in front of your dog's nose. When your dog gets to your hand, stop and reward. Repeat, just a few steps at a time, rewarding your dog along the seam of your pants. During your first session, make a big circle with your dog on the outside of the circle. If the dog moves ahead of you, stop moving and use your treats to lure it back to your side.

## Step 3

Practice several days until you see your dog is walking well on a loose lead for several steps before rewarding. Remember to stop if it moves ahead of you and lure it back to your side. Work on taking the treats out of your hand and placing your hand on the leash. Continue to reward occasionally for loose leash walking or "checking in" with you for treats.

## FREE

The "Free" cue is used when you want to allow your dog freedom to sniff and explore. The only rule is that the dog cannot pull you forward or in other directions.

## Step 1

Still working indoors or in a quiet place, go back and practice Step 3 of the "Let's go" cue. This time, at the end of the exercise say "Free" to your dog and let it move to the end of the leash. It can now roam as it pleases. Repeat this sequence several times until your dog gets the hang of it.

## Step 2

Start again in an area with no distraction such as a back yard or quiet sidewalk. Give your dog the "Let's go" cue and practice your leash walking. At the end release your dog with the "Free" cue. Practice calling your dog back to your side by turning and giving the "Let's go" cue. Repeat this sequence until your dog is fluent. Anytime your dog starts pulling during the "Free" time, stop moving and bring it back to your side with the "Let's go" and take a few steps with your dog next to you before rewarding. It may be necessary to back up a few steps or change direction to bring your dog to your side.

## WAIT

Sometimes it is important for your dog to stop moving and wait during a walk. This can happen at doorways, street corners or when you need to tie your shoe.

## Step 1

Set up a barrier in a quiet place indoors. This can simply be a broom across a doorway between rooms in your home. Walk your dog up to the barrier from a close distance using your "Let's go" cue. As you approach the barrier give your dog the cue "Wait" and then stop moving in front of the barrier. It is important that you don't allow your dog to cross the barrier even if you need to use the leash to do this. When your dog stops moving and the leash is loose, reward with a treat and then say "Let's go" and move through the barrier. Your dog can pick any position it likes (sit, lie down or stand) as long as it waits with a loose leash.

## Step 2

Repeat this exercise several times until you see your dog stop immediately on the cue and look up at you for the treat.

# Practice Walking

Now you're ready to go! To prepare for your walk, make sure you have several treats in your pocket and your dog has an understanding of the cues above. Set the tone for your walk at the doorway going out. Give your dog the "Wait" cue as you open the door. Keep your leash short so your dog cannot bolt out and wait until it stops moving and your leash is loose. Proceed with your "Let's go" cue and reinforce your dog for a loose leash and "checking in" with you.

## Helpful Tips

- On your walk, release your dog with "Free" to sniff or to go relieve himself.
- Use your "Wait" cue when picking up after your dog at all street corners and alleys.
- Continue to use your treats to occasionally reinforce good behavior and to keep your dog engaged.
- Do not let your dog fixate on another dog, person or animal.
- It is very important in that you are proactive and aware of what your dog is doing. If you see your dog is starting to pull towards or fixate on something, immediately call it to you with "Let's go" and change directions before you lose control.
- Use your "Let's go" cue and keep your dog at your side when passing people or other dogs on a walk. If you need to, pull out a treat to bring back focus.
- Do not let your dog pull you or rush ahead into new spaces or buildings or up to people or other dogs to greet them. Your dog needs to "Wait" for your permission and approach calmly.

Remember that being consistent will pay off in the end. For more exercises, enroll in a clicker training class or another class that incorporates positive reinforcement training methods. **\*See protocol for Clicker Training** Also, contact a trainer if your dog is lunging at people, other dogs or animals and is not responding to the instructions above. **\*See protocol for On Leash Reactivity**