

LOOSE LEASH 101

By Lisa Mullinax

Pulling on the leash is one of the first problem behaviors dog trainers are asked to address.

Pet stores are full of devices designed to stop inappropriate on-leash behaviors. They range from special leashes, harnesses, collars, and even the electronic collar, which administers an electrical shock. However, these training devices only address the effects of the pulling, like taking cold medicine when you have a cold. It doesn't make the cold go away, it just temporarily relieves the symptoms.

To really teach a dog perfect leash manners, your most effective tools are time, training and consistency.

WHO'S PULLING WHOM?

Have you ever watched your dog walk off-leash? Whether across the room or across the yard, most dogs walk at a brisk trot. This is their normal pace, which is much faster than ours. So really, they're just walking normally and we're the ones holding them back! The result is a constant tug-of-war down the sidewalk.

Rather than thinking in terms of fixing the symptom, the pulling, we need to address the cause by teaching our dogs how to walk at our speed or, in dog terms, a pace slower than death.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Prepare yourself to not walk your dog for a week or two. If you feel guilty about the lack of exercise, think of it this way: most breeds were bred for a specific purpose, which often requires great endurance and stamina. A 20-30 minute walk doesn't even begin to satisfy their need for exercise, so alternative activities, such as fetch in the backyard, a romp in the dog park, or a good off-leash run in a safe, secure area is much more their speed.

As with any training exercise, start working in an area with minimal distractions, such as your front yard.

Don't lose patience. If, after a few days, you give in and let your dog take you for a walk, pulling all the way, you will undo a significant amount of the training you have worked on.

Dogs will repeat any behavior that is rewarding. The more you allow your dog to pull you down the street the more he is rewarded for that behavior. In essence, you are training your dog to pull on the leash.

RED LIGHT - GREEN LIGHT

The first thing to teach your dog is a little math:

TENSION ON THE LEASH = NO FORWARD MOVEMENT

You can do this with a game of Red Light – Green Light.

Start walking forward with your dog. As soon as they hit the end of the leash, stop walking. *Red Light.* Once your dog releases the tension on the leash (even better if he returns to you), move forward. *Green Light.*

This means you may only cover the space of 100 feet in 20 minutes. Sound monotonous? It is. But the up-side is that, within 10-12 sessions, you will have a dog who has learned that he gets nowhere by pulling on the leash.

CONCLUSION

While working on these exercises is not as fun as Agility or Frisbee, it constitutes a relatively small amount of training which will make for much more enjoyable walks that you can enjoy for the rest of your dog's life!

Loose Leash 101 Workshop

Saturday 11/13/04
12:15 pm

This one-hour workshop will be devoted to teaching you how to train your dog to walk nicely on leash. Visit our website to register!

