

Walking on a Leash

The following article is taken from Dr. Ian Dunbar's *Walking on a Leash Behavior Blueprint*.



All dogs need to be trained to walk nicely on leash. If not, they are unlikely to be walked at all. And, we all should know that walking is a great way to exercise not only your puppy or dog, but yourself!

Trying to teach a dog to walk by your side using leash prompts and corrections requires a lot of skill and time, and even then all you have will produced is a well-behaved dog on-leash. If you let him off-leash and he's history; you cannot

safely take him for off-leash runs, and you still cannot control him around the house, where he is off-leash all the time.

Luckily, there are more effective and enjoyable ways to get the job done. First, teach your dog to follow off-leash. Second, incorporate many sits and stays for control and attention. Third, teach your dog to walk by your side off-leash and on-leash. After following these steps, you will find it is easier to teach your dog to walk calmly on the leash.

Teaching Your Dog to Follow Off-Leash

Your dog's desire to follow and remain close is the necessary foundation for walking politely on-leash. You must become the center of your dog's universe. You need to stimulate and strengthen your dog's gravitational attraction towards you by moving away enticingly and heartily praising your dog all the time he follows. Click your fingers, slap your thigh, or waggle a food treat or a toy in your hand to lure the dog to follow. Proceed with a happy heart and a sunny disposition: talk to your dog, tell him stories, whistle, walk with a jaunty step, or even skip and sing.

Do not accommodate your dog's improvisations; you are the leader, not the dog. Whenever your dog attempts to lead; accentuate his "mistake" by doing the opposite. If your dog gets ahead of you, slow down or smartly turn around; if your dog lags behind, speed up; if your dog goes right, turn left; Practice in large areas, such as in your backyard, a friends' yard, tennis courts, dog parks, and safe off-leash areas. Feed your dog's dinner dry food piece by piece as you walk. Once you see your dog following closer, time yourself while practicing following-courses at home, going around furniture, from room to room, and from the house to yard.

Practicing Obedience Commands - Sits, Downs, and Stays

Enticing your dog to follow off-leash takes a lot of concentration and it is easy to let your dog drift. Consequently, instruct your dog to sit or lie down and then stay every ten yards or so. Frequent sits, downs, and stays teach your dog to calm down and focus. They also give you the opportunity to catch your breath, relax your brain, and to objectively see where your dog's attention level is. Only have the dog Sit or lie down for a few seconds, to make sure they are paying attention then walk on again. Occasionally ask your dog to lie down for a minute or so to

watch the world pass by. You will find that the more down stays that you put into the walk, the closer, calmer, and more controlled your dog will be when following you.

Walking On-Leash

Teach your dog not to pull while you are both standing still. Hold the leash in both hands and refuse to move until there is slack in the lead. Once the dog stops pulling and maybe sits, praise him!!! Take a step forward and offer a treat and stop again. If the dog explodes going to the end of the leash he will back off quicker this time. Praise and repeat. The dog will learn quickly that he can make you stop and go. If he pulls you, stop, if he walks calmly next to you, you go.

Alternate Heeling and Walking On-Leash

For most of the walk, let your dog range and sniff on a loose leash, but every 25 yards or so, have your dog sit, heel, and sit, and then walk on again. Always sit-heel-sit your dog when crossing a street: sit before crossing, heeling across, and then sitting *on the* other side of the street.

To learn more, call the Ask the Trainer helpline at 764-1121 and sign up for a class or email us at askthetrainer@cabq.gov.