



RSPCA School for Dogs Information Sheet

Walking your dog

Walking your dog is an important part of spending time with your dog and providing them with enrichment and exercise. It may seem like a simple task, but it involves more than just grabbing a lead and running out the door. You will need to teach your dog how to walk nicely on a lead first!

Training pre walk behaviours

Pre walk behaviours are important so you can get your dog's focus and attention! It can make it so much easier if your dog responds reliably to its name and to other behaviours such as sit and target. Come to our training classes to learn more, and ask for our information sheets on Look at Me, Sit and Targeting.

First Things First

Before you grab your lead, stash some special treats in your treat pouch, bum bag or pocket (liver treats, cheese, chicken, etc.). Don't expect to get good result with boring treats! Use the most valuable treats for this training.

While training your dog to walk on a loose lead, focus on quality, not quantity. So keep training sessions very short, 2-3 minutes is optimal for your dog's learning.

Select the appropriate equipment

Being the state's premier animal welfare organisation, the RSPCA is opposed to the use of any devices that could be the cause of, or result in pain or suffering (such as pinch or prong collars, choker chains and remote training collars) to a dog. Such devices could also cause damage to the dog therefore leaving you liable for the Duty of Care to your dog under the Animal Care and Protection Act 2001.

There is a variety of humane training equipment available for your dogs to assist in walking them on a loose lead. All of this equipment including martingale collars, walking harnesses, head collars and double ended leads require them to be fit properly on the dog to ensure they are comfortable and effective. Our trainers at RSPCA School for Dogs highly recommend a front attach harness, combined with training, this is a valuable tool. Regardless of what equipment you use to help train your dog to walk on a loose lead, your main focus should be on an appropriate loose lead walking technique.



Desensitising your dog to equipment

If you are trying any equipment on your dog for the first time, it is important to teach your dog to love wearing it! Some examples are; rewarding your dog for having the lead clipped on and off



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its collar, or rewarding your dog for placing its nose into the head collar loop. Sometimes, this can take many training sessions to ensure that your dog is comfortable with the equipment. Ensure you spend time on these training sessions before starting your walking training. Otherwise, you can liken it to wearing a new pair of shoes for a 10km walk (so uncomfortable!).

Walk This Way

The first step in achieving loose lead walking is to teach your dog that when on lead, the best place in the world to be is by your side! We can achieve this by, in the first stages of training, keeping up a high rate of reward when the dog is by our side. As the dog learns the value of walking by your side, we can gradually reduce the rate of reward to the point where it can become random. (E.g. every 2 steps, every 5 steps, every 3 steps).



Distractions

When starting to teach (or re-teach) your dog to walk on a loose lead, avoid areas near cars, other dogs and other people, as these are distractions that your dog may not be ready for.

Start in the house or backyard teaching the dog to walk next to you by using food rewards. When your dog has mastered loose lead walking in the house and backyard, start to add higher distraction levels. This can easily be done by extending the walk to outside the front yard of your house - then back inside and gradually to the footpath of your house and your next door neighbour's house. Gradually you are making the walk (and your dog's concentration levels) longer and are adding more distractions as you are extending the walk.

Keep to short training sessions rather than one big one, as your dog will be more motivated to learn and will not get as bored.

Troubleshooting

If your dog starts to pull you towards a tree or blade of grass, then stand still like a statue and don't pull back on the lead. If you pull back on the lead, it can often make a dog pull harder! (This is also known as opposition reflex). Instead, encourage your dog to come back to you by using your treats and a happy voice. Praise your dog when the lead is loose again, take a step in the opposite direction and reward your dog with a treat.

Remember that when you allow the dog to pull, you are reinforcing the behaviour allowing the dog to get to where it is going.

If you can't get your dog's attention by using your voice, place a treat in front of your dog's nose and lure them gently back to you. Take a step and reward your dog for coming with you.

If your dog is finding it hard to concentrate in certain situations, go back to teaching your dog in a low distraction area such as your backyard.



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If your dog reacts to certain stimulus

At RSPCA School for Dogs, we use non-confrontational, non-physical, reward based training. This style of training is the most rewarding for both the dog and handler. As you are working with the animal's natural occurring behaviour, it is easy for the animal to learn, and is less stressful for the dog and for you.

For more help contact us.

Further reading:

<https://k9aggression.com/train-dog-to-walk-on-leash/?v=6cc98ba2045f>

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