

Leash Training Your Puppy

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Walking nicely on a leash is a skill every dog ought to have. Even if you have a large fenced backyard or live on a farm, there are times when your dog has to go on a leash. Veterinary visits, traveling with you, any sort of competition, and even something as simple as accompanying you on a walk is much more fun for all concerned if your dog is leash trained.

As with so many things, it is easiest to leash train your dog when she is a small puppy. First, the puppy must be accustomed to wearing a collar. A simple buckle or easy snap collar is best. Be sure to check that you adjust the size as the pup grows. Puppies may not notice their collars at all, may shriek and fuss, may lie down and go on strike, or may simply walk a few steps, scratch at it, walk on, etc. Let them work it out, and often within minutes or hours they don't even notice it.

The next step is to add a short leash to the collar. Let your pup just drag this around. Obviously, you should be nearby to make sure the leash does not snag on anything. Do this both indoors and outdoors if possible. You may want to stay at this stage for a couple of days.

Now, possibly with a slightly longer leash, you want to pick up the leash and follow the pup. Exert no pressure unless the pup is headed into trouble, and in that case, get down and call or coax the pup to you, trying not to pull on the leash. While retractable leads can be wonderful for a trained dog, they are not the best choice for teaching leash training as there is always some pressure on the dog, and some dogs simply learn to pull. Try to do this for a few minutes daily. Multiple short sessions are much better than one long training session.

At this point, your pup is ready to follow you! With leash in one hand and treats or a toy in the other for motivation, coax the pup to come along with you. Use plenty of verbal praise. Most young pups cheerfully follow you. When the pup is staying in leash range with no tension on the leash, give him lots of praise and reward.

Most puppies walk well on a leash with this start until about 4 months of age or unless strongly distracted. By then, the puppy has walked on a leash quite a bit and has some understanding of what you want. Now, if you are walking your puppy and a distraction comes along, first try to focus the puppy on you. Talk in a squeaky voice, offer treats for attention on you, or wave a favorite toy. If the puppy goes to the distraction, turn and go the other way. Don't give him any warning, just turn and go. The puppy will get to the end of the leash, give himself a mild correction and turn to see where you are. When the puppy turns, you can encourage him to come to you.

The puppy quickly learns that you do not make progress unless he walks nicely on the leash. This same method works fairly well with older dogs as well, unless they have been pulling for quite a while. Confirmed pullers may need the use of a halter-like device that is similar to a horse halter. This way, the person only has to control the head and is not pulling against the chest and neck of a big strong dog. Another option for adult dogs that pull is a prong collar. This collar looks frightening to the average dog owner, but it will not choke the dog and the pinches are often enough to remind the dog not to pull. You should not correct the dog with this collar but rather let the dog correct itself, while you stand still and the dog causes the correction.

If your dog has to be walked on a leash daily for elimination, you may want to use different words for his behavior on the leash. When you need strict attention, such as walking along a busy road, use a command for heeling (where the dog must be at your left side, close to your leg). When the dog is free to sniff or go to the bathroom, use a different word. Being free

