

Loose Leash Walking

(www.clickerlessons.com)

By "Loose Leash Walking" I mean walking for fun & exercise - this is not attention heeling (see the [Heeling](#) page for that).

First, I have to lay a little theory! Dogs do what works. Simple. For many dogs, they have always dragged their owners places. Some stop for a while if wearing a prong collar but continue if it's not on. Why do they do this? First of all, because it WORKS. Don't they always get where they wanted to go by dragging? Silly dogs probably think - leash means I pull my owner to the park! Also, dogs have a very strong urge to resist pressure. When they feel the pressure on their necks, they about can't help but pull against it. That's why sled dogs have so much fun! So, how to get the dog to stop pulling? You simply stop making it work for him. *Old Fact:* pulling gets me to the park *New Fact:* pulling doesn't get me to the park!

Now, although what I am going to describe is simple, it doesn't work quickly for most dogs. The longer the dog has been successfully pulling, of course, the harder it will be to convince him that it is no longer going to work. So, you want to set yourselves up to be as successful as possible. The first thing you want to do is get him tired out, so take him for a good long romp or ball throwing session. Then begin your training.

Be sure your dog is not wearing any kind of choke or prong collar - just a plain "buckle" collar. Then you are ready for your training walk. Remember all of that attention work you've been doing? Warm him up a bit with that first. Then start walking, just holding the end of the leash. Within a second or two he will probably hit the end of it and dig in to start pulling. YOU STOP (remember... you are teaching him that pulling no longer works). Stand perfectly still and do... nothing. Don't check back or say a word, just stand your ground & let him flail around at the end of the leash. After awhile, he will get confused & turn around & look at you (wondering what the heck is going on!). The instant he turns toward you, smile & begin to walk forward again. It's best to be patient and wait for him to turn on his own, but if he's taking forever, say his name (if you've been doing your attention work he'll turn around for that). Praise & continue walking forward. And as soon as he hits the end of the leash STOP again. Try to imagine that your dog pulling on the leash steps on your brake! Repeat about a zillion times.

Some dogs get the concept pretty quickly, others have the pulling habit ingrained so well they have a more difficult time. They are not stubborn, just well trained pullers!! Eventually, though, your dog will figure out that pulling no longer gets him where he wants to go. Now, to get there he must *not* pull.

You'll know he's getting it when he hits the end of the leash... and pulls back or turns around right away. At first, be sure to work without distractions to make it easier for him, but as he is doing better & better you can start to add those in.

To be successful you are going to have to be as consistent as possible. That means never letting him pull you anywhere EVER (unless you actually have a harness on him for carting or tracking, of course). I think it's important to try to get several good long walks in at the beginning of the training. By long I mean *time*, not distance. People with hard core pullers may not get more than down the driveway the first few times! I believe the dog needs the many repetitions of him pulling-you stopping so he gets the point & can make the connection. At that point he can decide to alter his behavior to get what he wants, which is to move forward.

Need a way to walk your dog during the time it takes to teach Loose Leash Walking? Try a Gentle Leader head halter - an instant cure (but only works when it's on).

Should you use the clicker or any treats? That will depend on you & your dog. Some dogs make the connection more quickly if you C&T each time he stops the pulling. Other dogs simply learn that they should now pull but release quickly in order to get that C&T. A bit TOO clever... experiment to see what works best for your dog.