

leash training

dog training basics

Long walks with your dog are great exercise and a great way to nurture your bond with your dog. But sometimes, it can be hard to tell who's walking whom. Training your dog to walk politely on a leash is the first step in creating a lifetime of good exercise and fun.

Equipment needed

Collar options

Buckle collar:

- Will not help manage pulling or untrained dogs
- Best for leaving on your dog to hold ID tags and licenses

Chain collars and prong collars are not recommended.

Head halter:

- Wraps over their nose and behind their ears
- Works like a horse halter
- Controlling the head controls the body
- The dog must be trained to accept the halter and not paw at it or try to rub it off; especially good for dogs that are strong pullers
- Not for use on extremely short-muzzled breeds

Harness:

- Not recommended for strong pullers
- May increase pulling tendencies
- Transfers all of the dog's pulling power to the leash

No-pull harness:

- Must be used with care
- Can cause injuries to legs and shoulders if used improperly

Leash options

Leather or cotton:

- Easy to grip
- Check with each usage for signs of wear or strain

Nylon:

- Can color coordinate with dog's collar
- Check with each usage for signs of wear or strain

Chain:

- Does not wear easily

Flexi leashes:

- Extendable leashes ranging from 10 to 28 feet in length
- Good for trained dogs only
- Can cause injury to the pet and/or pet parent if not used correctly
- Always check the clasp on your leash before each outing to ensure it is functioning properly
- Replace your leash as soon as possible if you notice any signs of damage

Treats

Training treats should be small, easily eaten and exciting. Treats are a great way to encourage your dog's happy participation in the training process.

Training tips

A good dog trainer can help you get started if you are not an experienced trainer.

Trainers recommend 6 to 12 foot leashes so you can keep your dog within a safe distance. Sometimes, when walking, you may want to keep the leash shorter. Collect any "extra" leash in your hand, and do not wrap it around your wrist and arm.

Dedicate your daily walk time to training sessions for a few weeks. Be consistent. Your dog should not be allowed to walk while pulling you.

A dog that charges out the front door and then drags you down the road will not be very enjoyable to walk with. Ask your dog to sit or wait before you open the door, have your dog remain sitting until you release them and then let them walk out.

Training puppies

Use a lightweight buckle collar for a puppy. Have lots of small treats and toys ready for redirecting their attention away from the leash. Start by letting them drag the leash around the house for a few minutes. They'll get used to the weight of the clip and leash, putting a little pressure on their neck. Occasionally, pick up the end of the leash and just hold it. They'll discover that pulling doesn't release the pressure but giving in to the leash does. Be there to supervise so they don't get tangled in furniture and get scared. A five-minute session is about all a puppy can handle.

The first time you hold the leash, follow your puppy around. Provide plenty of praise and treats for remaining calm.

Some pups will follow you anywhere. Take advantage of it! Some will start to explore a little more. Start early and build a good foundation of training for when the puppy becomes a teenager.

When you are ready to actually lead your puppy, start with a pocketful of treats and take just a few steps. They may balk and hang back. Encourage them and crouch down to their level if you need to. You can be pretty big and scary to such a little pup. Stop and praise them whenever they are by your side on a loose leash.

When they pull out in front, just stop until they turn to see why you aren't following them. Call them to you in a happy voice, praise them for coming and start walking a few steps again. Pretty soon, they'll figure out that they get lots of treats and praise

when they're at your side. Remember, do this for no more than five minutes and then quit. Make the training session as fun as playtime.

Training adult dogs:

An adult dog with a history of pulling will require more time to learn not to pull. It can be time-consuming to form a new habit and extinguish the old one. At about four to five weeks in a training cycle, it's common for a dog to seem like they forget everything you've been working on. Just keep practicing. Behaviorists feel this learning plateau is when learning transfers from short-term memory into long-term memory.

Remember that consistency is the key. Enrolling in a dog training class will give you a very good place to start, but if lessons learned in class are not reinforced or carried through at home, then very little will actually be learned.

Keep training sessions upbeat and fun. Treats and praise create better, quicker results! Change directions, speeds and focus frequently to keep your dog interested and listening. Don't forget to incorporate distractions into your training sessions so your dog learns to respond to your cues regardless of what is going on around them.

Note: The information on this Care Sheet is not a substitute for veterinary care. If you need additional information, please contact your veterinarian.