

How To Teach Your Dog To Walk On A Leash... - Brandon McMillan's Canine Minded

by Brandon McMillan



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When people get a puppy one of the first things they should do is train them to walk on a leash. In the dog training world we call it “Leash Breaking.” It’s a must for all dogs but it can also be one of the more frustrating commands to train for the novice dog owner, especially for those who have a big, powerful, high energy dog. There are several methods I like to use when teaching this but today I’m gonna go over a very simple one that works on most dogs out there.

First thing’s first; lets arm ourselves with some really attractive treats. Every dog is different with what they like so this is completely subjective to the individual dog. When teaching this I like to make sure the dog is hungry. You don’t want them starving because they’ll be too difficult to work. You want them hungry enough where they’re motivated to work and still retain a steady focus. Now we have some treats we attach a regular 4 or 6 foot leash to them and let the fun begin...

Have a treat in your right hand while your dog is on the left. (You can swap sides if you like but traditionally dogs are walked on the left) The leash will be in your left hand coiled up so the dog has just a little slack. Hold the treat in your right **CLOSED** hand about 6 inches from your dogs snout. Begin walking at a normal pace and say “Heel.” Now pay attention because here’s the trick... most dogs will naturally start jumping up and mouthing at the treat in your closed hand. This is completely normal and your goal is to keep your hand closed and wait them out till they stop this. Most dogs stop after 10 seconds. Some take longer. Whatever the case, wait them out and when they do stop this behavior they’ll be walking perfectly for a few seconds before they start the jumping/mouthing again. It’s key you praise and treat when they stop mouthing and are walking normal. It’s all about timing; it’s very simple and you only need a second or two to get the initial message across to them. Like most animals, dogs are trial and error creatures so they’ll quickly learn they get rewarded when they stop mouthing and walk at your speed. Do this over and over and what you’ll see is your dog will mouth less and less and walk more normal for longer periods of

time. Your goal is to add a second or two every time during the training session.

Now we can't have the dog rely on food to constantly do everything we want out of them so it's time for the weening process. We use the food to teach the technique and instantly start weening them off the food once they've learned. This is vital because if not done you now have a dog that is completely dependent on food when asked to do anything. Here's how I do this: I start by doing the same exact motion with the closed hand but now I only have a treat in my hand 8 of 10 times. The 2 times I don't have a treat I heavily praise the dog and let them know what a good job they did. I always make sure that the final time in the session is paid with a treat. I DO NOT want to end a session without giving a treat. This leaves a lasting impression on the dog and you'll see a lack of motivation the next time you work them. Your goal is to slowly use less treats over the course of a week till you eliminate them completely. Every day eliminate 1 more treat, always ending it with a treat. This will keep the dog constantly guessing when the treat is coming. Furthermore throughout the week your treat/reward hand should move to a slightly more normal position everyday. We started with it about 6 inches from your dogs snout and now we're slowly walking with it in a much more natural position but keeping in mind that hand is the signal hand so if the dog needs a little motivation by all means use that hand to get them back in gear.

Ok I know everyone has the usual questions here. What happens when my dog "Puts The Brakes On?" What if my dog is pulling too much? Well the answer is in the first paragraph. Make sure they're hungry! This is key to any training. Food is money to an animal. Much like you wouldn't work for free, dogs won't either. If they're hungry enough and you have a treat they really want they're going to stay right at your side to try and get it. And be sure not to ween them off the food too quickly. Training is a marathon, not a sprint. Much like us dogs learn at the speed of life. Teach them too quickly and they'll be good at it. Teach them slowly and they'll be great at it. Try it out for yourself and let me know how it goes. Ruff.

– *Brandon*