

How to Stop Pulling on Leash - FernDog Training

Fern

Getting a dog sounded like so much fun didn't it?

When you first thought about getting a dog you probably envisioned nice leisurely walks around your neighborhood on a beautiful sunny day. You probably didn't think it was going to be an arm-jarring, hold on for your life drag.

Before you get too mad at your pooch, you need to remember that dogs are not programmed to walk the way we do. Walking the way humans do is actually very unnatural for dogs.

Your dog is thinking, *"Why the hell aren't we running?"* It just makes no sense to go so slow to them. And they also want to know, *"Why on Earth would you walk in a straight line when there are so many awesome smells all around you?"* Don't forget the your [dog's nose is insanely more powerful](#) than yours and there are an overwhelming number of interesting scents pulling at your dog's sniffer, enticing him to investigate.

It's kind of like if you saw what looked like hundred dollar bills all over the place as you walked along. I'm willing to bet you'd go check them out, so let's cut your dog some slack.

The good news is that even though walking in a straight line right next to us slow humans goes against everything dog, they can be trained to tolerate and accept our pace. However, it can only happen with time and training.

Training Time

There are a number of different things you can try when trying to teach loose leash walking, and it may take some trial and error to figure out what teaching method works best for both you and your dog. Also, keep in mind what works for you may not be the best choice for someone else in your family. My wife and I used two different techniques and tools to train my dog.

Here are a few techniques that I will typically use when working with dogs that pull on leash:

Stopping

This is a simple one. As soon as your dog pulls forward and there's tension on the leash, just stop, wait for the dog to go from a forward orientation to a neutral one. Basically, as soon as you have some slack in the leash, then move forward again.

This technique is great because anyone can do it, however it can take some time for your dog to figure it out and younger, high energy dogs don't seem to get this too well.

Leash Correction

When there is tension in the leash, gently but firmly pull up on the leash and immediately release it. This is not a “snap,” but more of a repositioning of your dog from a forward orientation to a neutral one. And the important part of this technique is not the pull on the leash from us, but the relaxing of it. We want a relaxed leash and need to get back to it as soon as possible so as soon as you give tension you must immediately release it.

You will most likely have to give a series of pulls and releases before your dog understands that he needs to go at your pace, so you need to be patient and persistent. Depending upon your dog's size and strength you may get a bit of a workout with this one, which is when using a training collar/harness (see below) may be a good idea.

I recommend keeping your dog right next to you and not out in front if you're going to be using leash corrections. The farther ahead your dog is the more strength you'll need and the harder it's going to be.



Changing Direction

As soon as your dog moves ahead of you and you begin to feel the leash tightening, turn 180 degrees and go in the opposite direction, pulling your dog with you as you do so. When your dog catches up to you, if he now pulls in the new directions, turn and pull him back in the opposite direction again.

I call these “switch backs” and what happens is the dog will think that you're nuts and will begin to look up at you, waiting for you to change direction again. And if he's looking at you, he can't be pulling.

I used this technique when I used to volunteer at a shelter. The dogs were so amped up to be outside that they would pull my arm off every walk. I would start them in alley outside the shelter and do about 5 minutes of switch backs to get them to pay some kind of attention to me.

One variation of this that works pretty well is to let your dog go out in front of you and as soon as there is tension in the leash (aka pulling) you call him and walk backward. Have a smelly treat in your hand (I like [freeze dried liver](#)), call him in to you and when he's within arms reach lure him in close to you and give him the food.

Then continue on your walk and repeat this as you go. Over time and repetition your dog will start to equate the tension on the leash as a cue to come back and get a snack. So as soon as he starts pulling he'll voluntarily turn back around and come back to you.

Walk & Train

A great way to stop your dog from being distracted by the world and pulling you all over the place is to give him some tasks to keep his mind occupied on your walks.

A simple way to do this is by having him sit every twenty feet or so. Just stop and ask your dog to sit and reward him with a treat. Depending upon the area you're walking you can do every so many feet or use landmarks like driveways as an opportunity to sit. Soon, he will begin to anticipate the sits and keep looking up at you to see if it's time for another one.

Simple sits work fine but you can have him do all sorts of stuff on the walks to keep him attentive to you. Use your walks as a training opportunity and ask him to do any number of different obedience skills or tricks.

You can even use the environment that you're walking in and do some "urban agility." Have him go up stairs, jump rocks, go around trees, etc.... Use your imagination and make it fun.

I've created two audio training programs you can listen to as you walk your dog that will talk you through some basic skills while you're walking. [CLICK HERE](#) to check them out.

Teaching a Watch Cue

If you teach your dog a watch cue you'll be able to ask for it often on the walk and if he's looking at you, he can't be pulling ahead.

This is a great tool for very distractible dogs



who like to chase squirrels and birds, or who are reactive to dogs.