



# Loose Leash Walking

## What you will need:

- Treats
- A clicker
- Your dog's walking equipment

## Part 1: "Parallel Parking"

Our dogs are used to offering behaviors and getting treats *in front of us*. It can be difficult for some of them to start to expect treats in a different position! That's why for leash walking *we start by practicing building a strong foundation of your dog being fed at your side.*

1. Start with a handful of tasty treats in your hand.
2. Close your hand around the treats and bring your hand to your dog's face. Using your hand like a magnet, lure them into position at your side, facing the same direction as you are. The moment they get in position, click/treat, feeding them in position (directly to their mouth).
3. If your dog has trouble "lining up," use YOUR body position to help them! You don't have to stand completely still; you can help your dog by angling your body to help encourage them into the spot you want. At the exact moment they are in position (before they potentially overshoot!) click/treat.
4. To help them practice, we want multiple repetitions. Toss a treat out in front of you as a "freebie" so that your dog resets their position to eat it and you can repeat the behavior.
5. **Fade the lure ASAP** – For parallel parking, only use the lure a few times, and then progress to using your open hand to "park" or guide your dog. Once they are in position, click and immediately reach into your treat pouch to deliver the treat.

## Part 2: Step by Step

Once your dog is comfortable "parking" themselves by your side, your next step is to show them that walking at your side is the best place to be! Since they don't know what we want yet, it's our job to make it easy to understand.

1. **Take a moment to set yourself up.** The leash should be in the hand opposite to where you want your dog (so if the dog is on the left, you should hold the leash with your right hand, and vice versa). The clicker can be in your leash hand, button under your thumb. Treats should be on the dog's side, and the hand closest to the dog is dedicated to treating – it does not need to be holding the leash or "steering" the dog.
2. **Start by parallel parking your dog into a sit at your side**, with the dog's body lined up parallel to yours, both of you facing forward.

3. **Then, take a small step forward**, letting your dog know that you are beginning to move by telling them "Let's go" (or whatever cue you'd like to use). As they take that ONE initial step forward, click/treat (C/T) - be sure to deliver the treat directly at your side.
  - a. **A note on treat delivery:** We want to deliver the treat where we want the dog's body to be—even if they aren't quite there. This means that if your dog overshoots a bit further forward than your hand, we want to keep our hand where they would have been if they hadn't overshot. Feeding in the ideal place (often right at our pants seam) every time can help our dogs learn to expect food there. Why would they overshoot when they know going too far will mean they have to backtrack for the treat?
4. **Repeat!** Take another step, MARK, and reinforce. Then try taking 2 steps. If your dog stays with you, MARK and reinforce. If your dog falls out of position or overshoots, reset them using your parallel park.
5. **Set your rate of reinforcement (how long you wait between (C/T) based on the environment and your dog's skill level.** We want to click/treat while they are still walking beside us with a loose leash instead of waiting for pulling to happen. If your dog is too excited, shoots ahead, or breaks position, go back to fewer steps forward to make it easier. You may work at "1 step-C/T...1 step-C/T" for a little while! THEN try "1 step-C/T...2 steps-C/T!" and so on.
6. **When ready, VARY your schedule of reinforcement.** Once your dog is consistently taking 3-4 steps with you, begin to vary the number of steps you take before your C/T, rather than just increasing them. If we only ever make it harder, our dog will eventually become frustrated. But if we instead C/T at 2 steps...1 step...4 steps...3 steps...1 step...5 steps, etc., our learner won't exactly know when to expect the treat. Which means they might just wait a little bit longer to see if maybe the NEXT step is the one that gets the click!
7. **Adjust mechanics if necessary.** If feeding your dog is challenging, you can experiment with dropping a treat on the ground as you go. If your dog is short of stature, you can smear a long spoon with peanut butter or meat baby food so that you don't have to reach all the way down each time.

#### Example video of parallel parking and reinforcing first steps

#### **REMEMBER: SHAPING IS A STAIRCASE!**

If we make the next step TOO BIG (aka wait too long before reinforcing) the dog will not be successful and may shoot ahead of you. Work where your dog can be successful and increase the criteria (number of steps) in small enough increments that your dog can reach them easily!

