

Class 2 – Loose Leash Walking

Opposition Reflex

Did you read the book “Marley and Me”?

It’s a great book about a journalist who gets his first dog as an adult. It was a very successful book that was made into a movie a while ago.

I loved the part where they took Marley to an obedience class. Marley quickly made anyone who grabbed his leash look foolish.

He dragged both of his owners around the class until the instructor took the leash and was almost pulled off of her feet.

I won’t ruin what happened next, but it is a great read and I highly suggest it.

“The fastest way to STOP your dog from pulling on the leash is to STOP pulling on the leash.”

This sounds more confusing than it actually is, but it will make more sense in just a moment.

The term “**opposition reflex**” should be known by anyone who is training a dog.

Have you ever pushed down on your dog’s back and tried to force him into a down position? If you have, your dog probably resisted and pushed back.

The same effect happens when you pull on the leash.

Have you noticed that as you pull back on the leash, your dog pulls even harder?

This is the opposition reflex kicking into action. As you apply pressure on your dog, your dog will resist and apply counter pressure.

By the way, humans also show this phenomena. Opposition reflex will happen mentally and physically. Think about the last time someone told you to do something – not asked, but told. Most people will resist when told to do something. It’s completely normal and natural. It is the opposition reflex and it is biologically built into us.

Walking your Dog

Walking on a loose leash is one of the most difficult things to teach to your dog. Our goal is to have the leash loose on the dog as we are walking along.

If the leash tightens up, we will deal with that in just a moment.

All dogs pull on leashes and there are 2 primary reasons as to why:

- 1) Dogs are working animals – it appears as though they enjoy it
- 2) There is nothing of interest where they are – including us – so they pull to get to something more interesting

What do we do about it?

Well, the collar/harness is there only to attach the leash to the dog.

The leash is there to protect the dog from itself, **NOT** to manipulate the dog.

Consistency -> Everyone walking the dog needs to walk on the same side.

Right handed – dog walks on the left side

Left handed – dog walks on the right side

Your hand needs to go through the leash loop and grab. The hand not holding the loop is used to control the slack.

Taking off

Locate yourself properly to the dog

If you can, have the dog sit – if not, don't worry much about it. We will get there later.

Tell the dog "lets go!"

Your dog will probably take off. What do we do?

STOP! And let the leash slide through our slack hand, while bringing both hands to our solar plexus (your core, right at your belly button).

We want the dog to hit the end of the leash with some force.

And we do absolutely nothing except plant our feet and not budge. We stand there like a tree stump with a treat (as long as there are no distractions).

Within 3 to 59 seconds, the dog will look back at you and this is the moment where we show them that we have a lure and have them come back to us and sit.

Rinse and Repeat.

If the dog does not look back and there are no distractions, we can do 1 of 2 things:

- 1) Step towards the dog and sharply turn the other way without pulling on the leash
- 2) Get low to the ground

If there are distractions – other dogs, kids, etc.:

Gather the leash to the dog and use a lure to turn the dog away from the distraction and get out of the area

If the dog does not respond to the lure:

You are too close to the distraction. Body Block the dog in the other direction and get out of the area.

Body Blocking – Gather leash up to dog and put the leg closest to the dog right behind their ear, then gently push them 180 degrees and walk. Don't hesitate or they might go back to try to get to the distraction!

In the dog world, coming in between them and whatever "resource" they want (attention, dogs, etc.) shows that you are in control of that resource. It belongs to you, not them.

Be sure to talk to your dog while walking!

If you turn, tell your dog "Turn!" or "This way!"

But say the same command each time – Be Consistent!!

You can also have complete conversations with your dog; they will never tell another soul about anything you mention, plus they absolutely love the attention! It is also therapeutic for us to vent to them.

The most important reason to talk to your dog is that it makes you much more interesting than other things out there, so they tend to walk near you instead of walking farther out.

If dog goes to the wrong side of you and tangles you up:

Immediately stop and have the dog sit.

Spin yourself out of the leash

Reposition yourself properly to the dog

Reinforce -> Treat

Start the process again and begin walking

