



Taking your puppy for a walk

Going on walks with your new puppy is a great way to provide exercise and it also provides an opportunity to condition to environmental distractions. However, being on a leash is a new experience for your puppy. Some puppies do great on their initial outings but others may pull or even refuse to move. This can lead to stressful and challenging walks. The following are some recommendations that may help to make this process easier.

Conditioning to being on a leash

Your first step is to help your puppy understand that being on a leash is a good thing and can lead to fun adventures. Treats and toys can greatly help your puppy learn to make a positive association with being on a leash. Start this process indoors by attaching the leash to the collar or (preferably) a harness and offer some treats. Allow your puppy to drag the leash while you walk around the living space. Offer treats and toys to keep the attention on you and not on the leash. If your puppy grabs the leash in his/her mouth, trade by offering a treat. This is a non-confrontational way to teach your puppy to ignore the leash.

Keep the pressure off!

When your puppy is ready, continue to walk around but hold the other end of the leash in your hand. However, remember the following:

The number one rule of puppy leash training is to keep the pressure off.

Do not pull on the leash to make your puppy walk since this is the fastest way to make a negative association and can potentially undo your previous conditioning work.

Continue the conditioning process to keep the attention on you. Walk in a random pattern, making frequent turns and maintaining a happy attitude to encourage your puppy to follow along.

Addressing leash pulling

Some of the more outgoing and adventurous puppies can sometimes start pulling while they are on leash. If this occurs, continue the conditioning process explained above since this will help to teach engagement. Engagement means teaching your puppy to make eye contact which in turn helps in redirecting their attention towards you.

Another fun activity is to walk backwards while holding the leash in your hand, offering plenty of treats and verbal praise to keep your puppy following along. This prevents your puppy from rehearsing undesired pulling and lunging.

Responding to leash pressure is also another great way to prevent pulling on leash. Start this process by applying very gentle pressure on the leash and quickly offer a treat and lots of praise when your puppy walks in the direction that the leash is going. Remember, use very gentle pressure with this particular exercise!

When your puppy refuses to walk

Some puppies are a little more reserved and require extra patience and understanding to learn good leash manners. Management is the first step before addressing the behavior. This means ensuring that there isn't anything in the environment that is scaring your puppy. If there is, carry your puppy to a quiet place to help him/her decompress and try again later.

If your puppy seems ok but still doesn't want to walk, the first option is to wait. Be ready to offer plenty of praise and maybe even a treat when he/she decides to start walking. Another option is to allow your puppy to remain in place while you go to the end of the leash. Then offer plenty of praise when he/she starts walking.

Remember to be very patient since some puppies will pause for a while, then only walk a few steps before stopping again. In time, your puppy will start walking as long as you keep the pressure off the leash.

Using a long leash

Long training leashes can be very useful with most puppies. These are usually 10-15 feet in length. The basic premise is that it allows your puppy to explore their environment without pulling to get from one spot to the next. The long leash can also make it easier to maintain the pressure off which can result in more productive outings.

To ensure that your puppy is safe while on a long leash, practice reeling the leash in when your puppy is not wearing it. Hold the leash handle in one hand, then pull the leash through your other hand. Gather the leash as you continue to pull. With enough practice, you will feel confident in your ability to quickly reel in the leash to keep your puppy safe on walks. To make this process easier, use the long leash in a wide open space.

I recommend using a long leash versus a retractable leash. Retractable leashes can be more difficult to control and can even be dangerous if you accidentally drop the handle because it will retract and "chase" your puppy.