

# Basic training: Lead walking

Walking on a loose lead is one of the most important and useful things we teach our dogs. Training your dog to walk nicely using a flat buckle collar and lead should be the ideal to aim for. For puppies or dogs that have just entered the home, it is important they get used to their environment and can be managed when out and about before being expected to do perfect lead work. It is more important to have a confident relaxed dog that will be easier to train than one that walks well but is anxious. This handout details how to achieve this without your dog learning undesirable habits, ready for advanced lead work training later on.

## The collar

The first step with your dog/puppy is getting them used to wearing a collar. The easiest way to do this is to gradually introduce the sensation of having something on their neck without causing fear. Initially place it on the floor next to their food bowl while eating, and let them have a sniff at it - this helps form a positive association with the collar. Then several times a day, stroke them with it in your hand and reward. Then pop it on for just a few seconds, for example at dinner times. When you know they are happy with it you can leave it on.

It is important that you fit the collar correctly. You should be able to fit two fingers between the collar and your dog's neck. Adjust accordingly as your puppy grows.

## Introducing the lead

- When your dog/puppy is used to wearing their collar, take them into the garden, or select a room with a large open space.
- Just as before with the collar, introduce the lead positively and gradually. Attach the lead and initially let your dog/puppy wander where they want, but make sure the lead does not become tangled up.
- In the next session, call your dog/puppy to you and reward them with a treat. The aim is for the dog/pup to move around freely without worrying about the lead.
- At your next training session, repeat the above to remind your puppy what they have already learnt. This time when they come to you, pick up the lead and follow your pup wherever they want to go.
- Do not try to control their movements at this stage. They are just getting used to the sensation of being held on the lead. Allow your pup to wander at will until you are confident that they are happy with the lead. Give them lots of praise when they are moving freely.

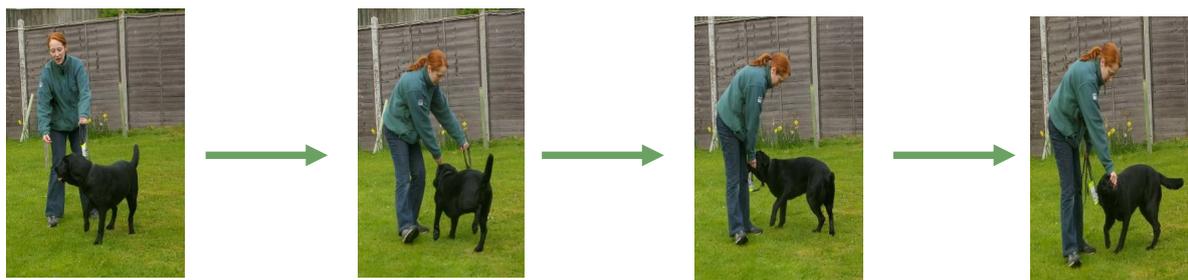
## Lead walking

- When your puppy is happy with the lead and is used to it being held whilst they are followed, it is time to introduce the puppy to walking with you by your side.
- Get some tasty treats and encourage your puppy to walk with you, luring them with a treat in your hand. To begin with, your pup will only focus on you for a few steps, but reward this behaviour with a treat.
- Repeat, but this time walking in the opposite direction, encouraging your puppy to walk with you. Work at getting your timing right, and only praise your dog when they are walking by your side. Introduce some circles as well as changes of direction so that your puppy gets used to walking alongside you.
- Lead walking is a matter of practise – and the more you practise with short 2-minute training sessions, the more quickly your pup will understand where they should be walking.
- When you start going out with your puppy, it is important that they are able to learn about the world positively, so allow them to explore and sniff their environment. Reward them for any loose lead walking and if they pull encourage them back next to you (as described on the next page).
- In the early days with a puppy, even a short walk will take quite a bit of time, which can be difficult to manage with children as well. It is recommended to practice a couple of routes first before introducing children to allow the puppy time to get accustomed to that route. Once you have done this a few times you will notice the puppy is more confident, pulls less, and is able to concentrate better, so can be easier to manage when walking with the family.

## Pulling

A dog may try to get in front of you simply because they are excited and want to explore and investigate the environment, this is a normal behaviour but we may not want our dogs dragging us about.

When your dog pulls ahead, do not pull them back; instead stand still, wait for them to turn round to look at you, praise them and then call them back to your side. Set off again and keep repeating. Give lots of praise and reward them with a treat for every couple of correct steps your dog does by your side.



## Pulling (Continued...)

Initially, you may only achieve a few steps walking up the drive or along the road. This is normal, you need to build it up gradually, session by session and making sure your dog is happy and responsive.

Progress may be slow, but if you reward the behaviour you want and come to a halt when your dog/pup is pulling; they will gradually learn which behaviour works for them i.e. they get to the park quicker by walking on a loose lead. If you are struggling to get your dog past a distraction they really want to get to, give yourself more space by luring them past with a handful of treats under their nose. Reward them once they have moved away. At Workshop 2 this process is covered in detail so that your dog is easy to manage when out and about and how to teach them to walk away from distractions without luring them.

## Lagging behind and stopping

Being on a lead is very restrictive for a dog, so if we want calm, relaxed, and confident dogs when we are out and about we need them to feel that being on a lead is a positive experience. We discuss in Workshop 2 that using negative equipment such as choke chains are not a suitable means of teaching lead work.

- It is common for dogs to stop and look at things in the environment; puppies may even sit while doing so. This is how the dog processes new things. If your dog does this, allow them to look until they are happy to move on. If they become over excited and start to pull, lure them away.
- If your dog shows signs of fear to anything on a walk, including avoidance or refusing to walk past (e.g. a full bin bag on the pavement), respect this and move away to a distance your dog is comfortable at. Your dog must feel that you will listen to them if they are unsure and will not be forced to walk closer. Allow them to calm down and continue with the walk avoiding whatever they have been worried by. Add this onto your list of things to gradually introduce your dog to. Next time be ready for your dogs reaction and stop at a distance they are comfortable at, reward and gradually take steps closer to it, aim to get a little closer each day. Don't push it too quickly, if your dog approaches then allow them to investigate it and become relaxed before moving on.
- Some dogs may seem to not want to walk with you; dogs that are not confident walking on a collar and lead or are easily startled may show this response. It is important that they have lots of positive experiences while being on the collar and lead at home and when out, and keep walks short and sweet until they have built their confidence up. Take toys and nice treats out with you, not to bribe them with, but to encourage fun games so they feel more positive about the experience.
- The **Family Dog** team are able to advise on specific situations you may be having problems with.