

Advanced training: Lead work



This lesson plan is designed to guide you step by step on how to achieve loose lead walking to eventually include children in harness and lead work as demonstrated at Workshop 2. It may seem like a long winded approach but this is how you will achieve solid lead work for the duration of your dog's life.



Benefits of teaching lead work:

- Stops your dog pulling on the lead.
- Aids in teaching children road safety.
- Helps children with transitions from inside to outside etc.
- Helps teach your dog self control and what behaviour to offer around distractions, which is also very important for recall training.
- Keeps walks calm.

Remember to keep intense training sessions short and sweet, 3 minutes maximum.

You will need a filled treat bag, flat collar and static lead (no choke chains, half checks or slip leads) and to have already introduced your dog to the collar and lead (see our Basic training: Lead work hand-out).

Lesson 1

Aim: That your dog can walk past the treats without pulling towards them and chooses to stay with you for a reward.

Step1: In a distraction-free location (e.g. lounge or garden) set up a pile of treats on the floor a good distance from you and your dog.

Step2: Reward them when they look at the pile of treats and then look back at you (even just an eye flick back to you).

Step 3: Take one step at a time towards the treats and pause between steps. Again reward your dog if they look at the treat pile and then back at you, or if they keep looking at you.

Step 4: If they pull towards the treats, **STOP, don't pull them back!** Plant your feet so they can't get closer to the treats. The second they look back to you, reward them and bring them back to you. Take a couple of steps back and retry.

Tips at this stage

- To begin with, give yourself plenty of space around the treats on the floor, then as you get more confident that they understand the exercise you can get closer to the distraction.
- If at any point your dog pulls towards the treats and seems to get stuck, so they are just staring at them and not looking back at you, wait a few seconds to see if they can work it out. If they still don't look back at you, prompt them by shuffling behind them or making a random sound to disengage them from the treats (try not to use their name).

Lesson 2

Aim: That your dog can walk past different distractions without pulling towards them and they will look away from the distraction when asked.

Step 1: Increase the level of distraction that you are asking your dog to walk past and repeat Lesson 1.

This may be your dog's favourite toy or a higher food reward, such as strong-smelling treats/human food. You may need to up your rewards as well, mixing something a bit more tasty in with the kibble in your treat bag.

Step 2: If your dog is confident with step 1 and is not pulling towards the distraction, up distraction levels further with someone holding the toy and wiggling it about or holding the treat out on their hand.

Again repeat Lesson 1 with this new level of distraction. If your dog whines, continuously pulls or gets frustrated, go back a stage to a lower level of distraction.

Step 3: Move the distraction to a different area.

Change where the distraction is placed e.g. different room, in the front garden etc. and check that your dog is still able to walk past without pulling. Dogs need to generalise their training to different areas before they will understand that the same rules apply everywhere.

Step 4: Start to introduce the 'Leave it' cue.

Once your dog has understood the exercise in different locations, you can add a verbal cue for when your dog looks round at you, to eventually use when you come across distractions on a walk.

Every time the dog turns away from the distraction towards you say your cue e.g. 'leave it' and immediately reward.

Tips at this stage

- Don't use 'Leave it' in everyday life until you are confident they will respond.
- In the mean time if you come up against a distraction you aren't ready for, get a handful of nice treats and put it under your dog's nose to get them past.
- Test that they understand 'Leave it' in your training sessions by asking them while they are looking at the distraction, if they immediately turn away you are ready to progress.
- If they don't turn away from the distraction then it needs more practice, or you need to reduce the level of distraction back to just a couple of treats on the floor.

Lesson 3

Aim: To start to get your dog walking on a loose lead when you are out and about.

Step 1: Start the same training outside.

Set up a similar scenario outside, perhaps at the front of the house or on the driveway etc. Repeat Lesson 2 in this environment. As mentioned, your dog will need to generalise their training. When visiting a new environment be ready to repeat this training and increase how many treats you are using to reward the right behaviour.



Step 2: Pick one route to teach lead work.

Pick a quiet, fairly distraction-free route (i.e. don't start in the park or where the neighbour's cat is always under the bush).

Apply the same training from the last two lessons. Stopping every time the dog pulls towards anything, waiting, encourage them back next to you and reward. When the dog is walking beside you, keep verbally rewarding them and every now and again give them a treat.

This is an ideal time to build in obedience around the road, asking for a sit at every kerb on your chosen route.

Step 3: Introduce your 'leave it' cue around real life distractions.

Once you have built up distractions inside and outside the home and your dog is reliably responding to the 'leave it' cue, start to practice using your leave it cue around real distractions.

Start by being as far away from any distractions as you can e.g. if there is another dog coming give yourself a lot of space, ask your dog to 'leave it' and be ready with a handful of treats. If your dog responds, drop your handful of high-value treats on the floor for your dog to find. This will reward them for leaving whatever the distraction was and will keep their eye contact away from the distraction.

If this is successful, don't push your luck, turn back to where you just came from and walk away, rewarding your dog for coming with you. Then the next time you come up against a distraction, consider getting a bit closer each time.

Tips at this stage

- Choosing a single route to practice on helps make it clear for your dog as there may be times when you don't have time to insist on lead work.
- If you plan on your dog doing harness work, it is also useful for your dog to have the harness on while you are doing this training so they know it is a 'working' walk. Also using an extendable lead for fun walks and a solid lead for 'working' walks will help your dog distinguish when they are in a training session and when they aren't.

Lesson 4

Aim: To introduce your child walking with your dog.

Do not introduce the 'dual lead and harness' lead walking work until your dog is over 1 year old (12 months); or if a rescue adult dog, you have owned the dog for at least 12 months. This gives your dog time to settle into the home life, emotionally, mentally, and physically mature, learn more basic lead walking and life skills, and for children to build a relationship with the dog.

Set up: your static lead is attached to your dog's collar. There is a secondary lead attached to your dog's harness for your child to hold on to. We like the Ezydog Cujo lead with a water-ski style handle.

Step 1: Find a volunteer to come out and practice your selected route using the harness and lead set up.

Your volunteer should imitate child behaviours whilst holding onto the harness lead, and build up these behaviours slowly under your guidance as to what your dog is confident with. With you continuing to reward your dog for ignoring whatever happens on the harness and walking on a loose lead.

Step 2: Practice your route until you are confident. Start to reduce the number of treats you need to give your dog, and keep up verbal rewards and randomly treating round the route so your dog never knows when the treat is coming.

Step 3: If you need to pass a distraction, be ready to ask your dog to 'leave it' and be ready with the reward.

If your dog is still pulling towards distractions or is fearful around the route then you are not ready to progress onto using the harness with the child. Repeat previous lessons until your dog is responsive and is able to work through anything they are fearful of. See the 'Problem solving' section of this hand-out for more information on this.

Step 4: If you are confident your dog is listening and responding well, but ignoring your volunteer, you are ready to introduce your child.

Step 5: If you need to use the harness set up on other routes, introduce the new routes in the same way, first with you just practicing with your dog and volunteer before introducing the child.

Tips at this stage

- Whilst practicing the lead work behind the scenes, you can also concentrate on building up child dog relationships and introducing them to the harness and lead in safe environments e.g. through doing fun activities in the garden whilst your dog is wearing it.
- You may want an extra person to accompany you on your route when you first go out with your child in case you need an extra pair of hands, and until you are confident.
- We don't advise children are tethered to the dog for safety reasons.



Problem solving

There are a few common problems you may come up against when teaching lead work. Please remember you can contact us at any point for further advice.

- **My dog pulls in front, comes straight back next to me for a treat but immediately pulls forward again**

Your dog understands the exercise but has got in the habit of pulling and coming back for the treat. To break this habit, reward your dog for coming back to you but pause on the spot for longer and keep your dog's attention, reward again for not immediately pulling in front by putting a treat on the floor behind you. This will discourage lunging out in front as they want to hang back in case a treat goes behind you.

Also every now and again, walk back where you have come from or change direction completely so they can't predict which way you are going to go.

If your dog holds a loose lead position, make sure you reward them with verbal praise, and giving them a treat every few steps or so.

- **My dog lunges at other dogs or people**

If you are unable to distract your dog away or they don't respond to the 'leave it' cue you have taught, you need a few extra steps in your distraction levels. Repeat lesson one and two but with increasing distractions. Where possible using stooge people and dogs to practice around in set up training sessions. You may also want to consider speaking with a trainer about whether an adult dog training class may be suitable for you. Visit:

<http://www.apdt.co.uk/dog-owners/local-dog-trainers>

If you feel that the dog may be showing signs of aggression then please contact us for more in depth support.

- **My dog is fearful of things on our route**

If your dog is fearful of anything when out and about, make sure you add the triggers onto your gradual introductions list and set aside separate time to work on it. E.g. if your dog is scared of traffic, visit an area with a busy road but be far enough away where the dog is comfortable and happy to take treats, reduce this distance over time until your dog is confident. Don't rush them, go at their pace. Remember the dog fiddle responses from workshops 2 and 3 to help you read their behaviour.



Again please contact us for specific advice.

- **My dog doesn't like the harness**

If your dog doesn't like having the harness on, gradually introduce them to it at home. Put it on at meal times if they like their food and put it on for games in the garden. If they don't like it going on, put it near them when they are eating, encourage them to put their head through with treats. When they are more confident around the harness put it on for a second then take it off and gradually build up the time the harness is on. Consider trying a fleece lined harness if problems persist. Some dogs are body sensitive and won't ever be comfortable wearing a harness. Contact the **Family Dog** team for more help.

Problem solving (Continued...)

- **My dog doesn't like their treats on a walk, they will only eat them at home**

You will need to experiment with what treats to use when out, it may be you need much higher value rewards like chopped hot dog, cheese, cooked liver etc. You may be asking the dog to concentrate in an environment that is too distracting too soon, go back a stage to a quieter environment or find a safe space to practice e.g. someone else's garden. Dogs will not eat if they are stressed– check their body language.

- **My child won't hold their lead attached to the harness**



Whilst working on training you will also need to create a positive relationship between the dog and the child. We give you ideas for this in the workshops, but contact us for more ideas/ways we can work on improving their relationship.

Some children prefer leads with a different handle; we find 'Ezydog' leads with a water-ski style handle are very successful (see 'Equipment list' handout for more details). Children may prefer it covered in stickers/material they like or have chosen.

- **I have to give my dog a treat every single step**

Once your dog understands the exercise and is able to do lead work around set routes you can start to reduce the number of treats you are having to use. Start to reward every other step, every third step, every fifth step, every other step etc. so the dog never knows when they are going to be rewarded. This will keep their motivation up as well as reducing their dependency on constant rewards.

- **My dog spends the whole walk staring at me or keeps coming in front of me for the treat**

It's brilliant that they aren't pulling but you possibly don't want them just staring at you. If this is a problem, say good before giving them a treat so they can listen for the cue that a treat is coming rather than relying on your body language. Also reward them for looking away but holding the loose lead position. You can also reward them on the floor rather than your hand. If they are cutting in front of you, make sure your treat bag is on the side that you want your dog to walk on, and you reward them at the side of you or behind you, never from in front.

- **I want my dog to support on the school run but don't know how to introduce this**



Practice this as your set route. Make sure your dog is comfortable with the route at quiet times. Practice walking the dog past school at play times so children are around but aren't approaching them. Gauge what your dog is like around visiting children, remembering your dog body language and fiddle responses. Gradually build up to either drop off or pick up times rather than doing both in one day. If there's another school nearby you can watch busy times at a distance where you know you won't be approached. Keep a close eye on your dog, be ready with treats or to remove them if you feel it is too much. Never leave your dog tied up outside school, or allow multiple children to approach at once.