

Tug Of War

One of the top three requests for assistance from dog handlers is “How do I stop my dog from pulling?” AKA as loose leash walking. Dogs pull because they can, they get away with it, and they get reinforced for doing it. A dog’s nose is their super power so pulling towards a scent can be self rewarding. We also unintentionally reinforce pulling behavior by tugging back on the leash, scolding or by cueing other behaviors like “Come”. These responses are reinforcing because we are giving our dog attention for the undesired behavior. Our attention is probably the highest form of reinforcement for our dog. **Tugging on the leash will often create a tug of war.** Here are some steps that must be consistently and constantly practiced using the positive only mark and reward method. Always start in an environment with the least distractions.

1. Constantly get and keep your dog’s **attention** in all settings.
 - Name game
 - Alternate sound
 - Even singing can make you more exciting than the environmental distractions.
 - Silence your phone so you won’t be distracted.
2. Consider different **equipment**.
 - Front clip harness (my favorite)
 - Martingale type collar
3. Consider altering your **leash handling technique** for loose leash walking.
 - Use only **one hand on the leash**.

- Keep the leash short and hold it close against your abdomen. Put your thumb through the leash and gather up the leash to make it short. To reduce wrist injuries don't wrap the leash around your wrist.
4. **Create a zone of reinforcement.**
 - For training purposes pick one side to keep your dog on.
 - Hold the **leash with the hand opposite the dog.**
 - Put your **treat pouch on the side of your dog.**
 - Use your free hand to deliver the treats right where you want your dog to be. That is the only use of that hand. It is difficult, but please resist using that hand to pull back on the leash when the dog starts to get ahead of you.
 5. **Always start with a sit** (preferably at your side, a future training topic). This simple starting position gives you more control.
 6. **Use consistent cues.**
 - Always let your dog know what's coming next.
 - "Let's go", "heel", "walk", "with me".
 - Frequently stop along your walk and have your dog sit. Don't forget to mark (verbal "click" or actual clicker) and reward in the zone of reinforcement.
 7. Let your dog self-teach not to pull.
 - Practice **Tight Leash Drills** in a low distraction environment before using it on your daily walk.
 - Plant your feet and toss a low value treat in front of you when your dog goes to get it the leash gets tight. **Say nothing. Be patient. Stand still in place.** Your dog, after chewing, will probably **look back** at you

wondering where the next treat is. This is where you click for the behavior of looking back. With practice, the tight leash becomes the cue to look back.

- **Create a chain of behavior.** When your dog looks back (still be silent) take a few steps backward, tap your knee in the zone of reinforcement and reward with a higher value treat.
- **Extend the chain of behavior.** After successfully and reliably looking back and returning to your knee, cue a sit and reward. Now the chain of behavior becomes tight leash, look back return sit treat.
- With practice, every time your dog creates a tight leash, the chain of behavior begins. Soon the dog realizes that hanging close by my human is just more rewarding (if you continue to pay for it, even without treats).

8. When out for a walk and your dog starts to pull, plant your feet, stand still and let the practiced chain of behavior take over. Mark and reward in the zone of reinforcement with a treat of higher value than what the dog was pulling toward.

9. Create a **Release** word to let your dog know that you have stopped walking and they can be a dog at the end of the leash. Sample cues are “Okay” or “Free”.

Tug of War belongs on the playground not on your walk.