



## 3 DOG WALKING PROBLEMS YOU CAN EASILY FIX

Walking your dog is not just a fun way to exercise your pooch, it's also a great way to soak up some Vitamin D and work off those extra calories for yourself. However, when your pet won't pay attention to you, constantly pulls on the leash and reacts to whatever person or animal goes by, walking your dog can be a totally unpleasant experience. Further training is in order.

Here are just a few tricks you can do yourself when out with your dog that can make both your lives easier and your walks more enjoyable.

### Your Dog Pulls On His Leash

If your dogs are like mine, they love to be outside, and the several-times-a-day walk is a stimulating and exciting exercise. Your dog's desire to pull ahead can be very strong.

As 2-legged humans, we do not make ideal walking partners since a dog's natural and comfortable walking pace is much faster than ours. Having to walk calmly by a person's side when the only thing a dog really wants to do is run and investigate his environment requires a degree of impulse control that can be very difficult for some dogs to utilize.

Walking on a loose leash can be one of the hardest lessons for your





energetic pup to learn. Try using some of these practical teachings when out on your next excursion:

-  Consistently reward your dog for paying attention to you and walking in the desired position (next to you or close to you). Try using special treats in the beginning, and, as your dog starts to understand his place during your walks, reward less and less frequently, replacing food with loving words and strokes.
-  When your dog pulls on the leash, immediately stop and stand completely still until the lead relaxes, either by your dog taking a step back or turning around to focus on you. When the leash is nicely relaxed, proceed on your walk. Repeat this as often as necessary until he gets the idea.
-  If your pup continues to pull, try the “reverse direction” method. At the first tightening of the leash, issue a ‘Come on’ cue, turn away and walk off in the opposite direction, without jerking on the leash. Keep a treat handy as a reward for when he quickly follows your lead.
-  Play the “follow me” game. Hold on to your leash and take several backward steps away from your dog. The backward movement is inviting, so your dog is likely to turn and follow you. Say “yes!” as your dog approaches you, then immediately reward him with a treat. This game helps your pup focus and move with you. The next time, back away several steps in a new direction. Once again praise and reward. Repeat this game until your dog is actively moving with you as you turn away.
-  Set up a goal for your dog – it could be a cookie on the ground, or a toy he adores. With your dog on leash, take a step toward the goal. The instant he draws forward and tightens the leash, say “Oops!” and go right back to the starting point. Repeat,



repeat, and repeat, imposing penalty yards whenever your dog draws the leash tight. You'll probably need to practice this several times during each walk for your pup to eventually understand that the treat comes only when the leash is loose.

Be sure to watch [this video](#) with the sound on to see how to clicker train your pup to walk loosely on a lead.

### Your Dog Is Easily Distracted

You're out on a lovely, long stroll with your best furry buddy and everything is going along nicely. The sun is shining, your pup is paying attention and walking on a loose leash, and then...BAM! Squirrel!!!

**Check out these strategies on keeping your dog calm and focused when distractions loom:**

 Create distance between your pooch and the "distraction" as soon as possible. It may be a challenge for your dog to pass another dog/person/strange animal at a distance of 10 feet, but he may be able to pass that same diversion at 30 feet with no trouble. Get that distance and move on.

 Cue an alternative activity. If your dog knows "sit" or "down," grab a treat and send the signal for this behavior. This can cause your pet to focus entirely on you while receiving a reward for good conduct.





 Try a body block. Place yourself between your dog and the distraction so that he can no longer see whatever is causing him to not pay attention to you. Alternatively, you can move him to walk on the other side of your body as you walk quickly on.

 If you know your pup goes straight for every squirrel sitting in his eye view, preempt his probable behavior with another trained behavior...and reward *only* when you say it is appropriate. For example: you notice that he starts pulling on the leash as you get closer and closer to the squirrel. Stop immediately and call your dog to your side, making him sit. Begin your re-approach of the squirrel, stop and correct again whenever the leash becomes tight. **ONLY** approach the squirrel when your pup is no longer pulling and is walking on a loose leash.

 Pick up your walking speed. Your dog may be one that becomes easily distracted by that infamous squirrel if you're both just moseying along. Break into a run or speed-walking mode and keep him moving happily right on past the tree.



 Increase the value of your "treats." The dog that ignores his favorite kibble to climb the tree after the squirrel may pay more attention to you if you pull out his favorite squeaky toy, piece of boiled chicken or small bite of cheddar. Save the kibble for rewarding him during the calmer portions of your walk.



- 🐾 As training continues, and you no longer have to treat with kibble at every small distraction, you may find that you need to reinforce your dog with a high-value treat during huge disruptions. Use the “bigger and better” treat for every step during the training sessions until you can get him past the distraction without pulling.

Watch [this video](#) to learn ways to keep your distracted dog focused on you and walking on a loose leash.

### Your Dog Lunges At Other People Or Pets

Many untrained and under-socialized dogs will lunge at other people and animals. Often worse when the dog is on a lead, the lunging can be a reactionary behavior cause by fear, aggression and/or some sort of territorial anxiety. The situation is worse on a leash because your dog can't approach the stranger in a safe and relaxed way.

Normal canine social rules don't apply – and aren't allowed – when you're walking your dog. The butt sniffing, circling and checking out each other's body language seen by strange dogs in the off-leash dog park need to be curtailed when you're out with your pooch on a leash.



**Here are some ways to off-set your dog's tendencies to lunge at strange people and dogs:**

- 🐾 Avoid the stimulus. When walking your dog, if you see someone – or something -- ahead, cross the street, turn around, or wait behind a car. Make your walks fun –



change speeds, go around obstacles, pivot in different directions – so that your dog is paying attention to you, instead of scanning his environment for danger.

-  Pre-condition your pooch to new people and animals by using a friend and the friend's dog to check for reactions. You'll need to determine what your dog's threshold is with other dogs and people. Does the stimulus need to be just a few yards away, or is just seeing something on the other side of the street enough to set him off? If you are using a friend and their dog, find somewhere that allows your friend to walk their dog within sight of yours, then out again (for example use trees or cars as a barrier). Each time the pair is in view – and your dog is quiet – give a treat and lots of praise. You are aiming to make an association between seeing the dog and getting lots of treats and praise.
-  Wear your dog out prior to your walk. Remember, a tired dog is a happy dog, so throw the ball, take your dog out for a half-mile run or do your training at the beginning of your normal walk so that all of that excess energy has been redirected to positive pursuits.
-  Don't allow your pup to "fence fight." When out walking, move your pooch away from yards where you recognize territorial dogs that will bark and try to come through the fence to get your dog. This lowers your dog's fear and arousal levels.
-  Resist the urge to pick up your small dog when strangers approach. Often, carrying your dog around gives him the confidence to snap or bite at whatever is coming his direction. He's not really protecting you – he's protecting himself. Allowing your pup to walk forward on his own builds confidence and social skills.



**Please note:** *NEVER PUNISH A DOG FOR REACTIVE BEHAVIOR.* If you yank on your dog or yell at him to stop, all you have done is reinforce the idea that people make bad things happen. And if you punish your dog for growling, your dog may go straight to biting without a clear warning sign. Your dog is actually giving you important information that can help keep both your dog and other people safe. He is telling you that he is too close to what is making him anxious – in this case, people.

This [video](#) can give you some ideas of how to help your reactive dog behave appropriately around strangers.

Be ready for setbacks and don't use any form of punishment. Scolding your dog for pulling on the leash, reacting to other dogs/people or not performing as *you* expect just further cements that negative association he might have with leashes and socializing with others and bad things happening. Keep all your walking/training sessions' positive, using lots of rewards. Any naughty behavior needs to be ignored and taken as a sign that you are progressing too quickly for your dog. You might need to take a step back and work on easier lessons.

**Remember, positive reinforcement (treats, loving voices and strokes) is what your dog craves, so use that to your advantage. Happy trails!!**

