

Teaching your dog to walk on a loose leash is simple but requires some time and patience. If you are going to begin leash training, your dog cannot be afraid of the leash or of having its collar held. See the handouts on Teaching the Collar Grab and Desensitizing Your dog to the Leash. Once your dog is very good with these exercises, you are ready to move forward with leash walking.

To begin, you should have a treat pouch full of small bite sized pieces of your dog's favorite treats. An alternative for some dogs, especially very small dogs is a long handled plastic spoon or spatula and peanut butter, canned cheese or other spreadable treat (whichever your dog likes best).

## Step 1

Begin inside the house at a time when there are minimal distractions. You can start with the dog dragging the leash or without the leash on at all. Begin by giving your dog a treat just for standing near you. Encourage it to come near you by making "kissy" sounds, clapping your hands on your knees or talking to the dog in an upbeat happy tone of voice. If there are no other distractions, the dog will soon discover that you are the most valuable and exciting thing in the room.

## Step 2

Once you have your dog's attention, begin by taking 1-3 steps. You can put the leash on the dog if it is not already wearing it but do not pick up the leash. Allow the dog to drag it. If the dog follows you when you take a step, mark the behavior by saying "Good", "Yes" or click a clicker then promptly give a treat. Do not give the treat before the marker! To learn more about markers and reinforcers, see the associated handout.

## Step 3

Gradually work up to taking 3-5 steps, then 5-7 steps, until you can walk continuously, without stopping, and reward your dog every few steps for staying next to you.

## Important!

When you give your dog the reward, give it to him right next to your thigh on the side that you want your dog to walk on. Always provide the reward at the dog's mouth level (for shorter dogs you may need to bend down part way to deliver the treat to the dog's mouth, but this is where the long-handled spoon can be used. For smaller dogs you can extend the spoon and allow a lick or two then withdraw the spoon while you take your steps).

If the dog walks out ahead of you, STOP immediately and stand still until the dog turns his attention back to you. When the dog turns his attention back to you mark the behavior and give a treat. If the dog does not immediately turn back towards you, make a noise such as a kissing noise or say the dog's name. If your dog still does not turn around take one step back at a time until the dog does turn and look at you. As soon as the dog turns and looks at you, use your marker to mark the behavior and give a treat.

If the dog continually gets out in front of you, give tiny treats at your side more frequently. For example, give one treat for looking at you while stationary then as you take a step forward give a second treat for the dog taking the first step with you. Give another treat before the dog can get out ahead of you. You may need to "rapid fire" treats like this for a few seconds until the dog catches on that walking next to you is more rewarding than walking out ahead of you. As the dog gets more used to walking next to you, you can reduce the rapidity of treat delivery. Remember that your timing is *everything* and if your dog is not being successful, try giving treats more frequently.

## Step 4

- When your dog is reliably following you, you can pick up the leash and start at the beginning by taking just 1-3 steps at a time and then marking the behavior and giving a treat.
- Keep the leash loose; do not put pressure on the collar.
- If the dog pulls, stand still and then when he stops and relieves the pressure on the leash, mark with your marker and give a treat.

## Step 5

- Once your dog is walking on a loose leash inside your home, start over from the beginning in the back yard.
- Begin teaching the dog to follow and change directions by adding slight pressure on the leash when you change directions.
- Lure and reward the dog to change directions with a treat if necessary.
- Quickly release pressure on the leash every time your dog turns and follows.

## Step 6

- When your dog is reliably walking next to you in this low distraction area you are ready to start increasing distractions gradually.
- You can move to practice in larger enclosed spaces or
- Begin practicing in the front yard. Remember to return to step 4 every time you move to a new place or add other distractions.

## Don't Forget!

When you increase distractions, you have to increase the frequency of the reward delivery. It is also important to have very special yummy treats for working on loose leash walking when there are distractions. Your dog would enjoy exploring all types of new distractions but if you have chosen the right type of treat, he will choose to ignore those things to get the treats that you have. Just remember to keep the treats very tiny, no larger than a green pea. You don't want your dog to fill up too fast.

Each time you begin in a new place, remember to stand still and wait for the dog to choose to stay near you. When the dog chooses to stay near you then you can begin moving – but only a few steps at a time at first. If your dog is not taking the treats that you have provided, in the next session try a higher value (read: more flavorful junk food) such as hot dogs, bits of cheese, bits of chicken or even steak.

When teaching the same behavior in a new environment you are adding a level of distraction which makes it harder for your dog. Also, when teaching the same behavior in a new environment, your dog should catch on to the “game” a little bit faster than the last time. If your dog is not catching on quickly, back up to a previous step and make sure you aren't missing anything or try decreasing the amount of distractions that are competing with you for your dog's attention.