

Walking on a loose leash

Nicole Beasley Planet K9

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After walking your dog, do you feel like you have been in an arm wrestle with Sylvester Stallone? Or did your dog bring you down to his level after tripping you when criss-crossing between your feet?

The important thing is that when you take your dog out on a lead, you are the one who should be leading, not the other way around.

A dog can quickly learn his street smarts if you are in control. A walk can be a pleasant experience for both of you instead of

a mobile tug of war.

Let's start at the beginning with the basics for stepping outside. You have a couple of options to get into gear with the right gear. Collar or harness? Use a good-quality buckle-up collar. Make sure it's not too tight. It's hard to walk when you are choking. You should be able to slip your fingers between the collar and neck, and your dog will need to have his council registration and other identification displayed on his collar.

Or there's the harness. Little dogs are best with a harness with a back clip for the lead. It takes the pressure off their necks. A harness with a chest clip for the lead suits larger, stronger dogs. The front-attach harness uses the dog's body weight against himself. If he strains too much the harness will turn him around. Head collars are terrific for very strong or boisterous dogs; they work by controlling the head and the rest of the body follows.

Any walking equipment mustn't be too loose or tight. It should allow for the dog's natural gait. All walking gear must be introduced to the dog in a gentle, positive way.

If you have a boisterous dogs, invest in a good-quality lead. I have seen too many cheap leads simply break at the clip. Look for one that is double-stitched along the length of the leash.

We want to teach the dog to walk on one side of you and not criss-cross or pull. Decide which side you prefer your dog to walk on. Hold the leash by the handle and step forward; if your dog is walking nicely beside you, praise and reward him with a treat. If he pulls or crosses over stop and walk backwards until the leash becomes loose. Your timing is important. Repeat this many times in a small area until your dog understands that the quickest way to move forward is by having a loose leash.

Group obedience classes are a great way to teach your dog to walk on a loose leash despite the distractions of other dogs.

When you and your dog are out, he will often want to follow his nose – literally. A dog's sense of smell is incredible; he uses it to see who's been in his neighbourhood. He too might want to leave his calling card. He might not be smelling the roses, but to him those scents are even better. So be patient and give him a little time. A dog being dragged down the street by an impatient owner too busy to stop is a sad sight.

Again, the key to making sure you dog learns a good new habit is consistency. The lessons themselves are not hard to practise, but it's up to you to do them regularly and be consistent.

After all, when you and your dogs head outside it should be a walk in the park