

# Pulling On The Lead

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**Dogs** pull on the lead for a simple reason: pulling works. If a dog wants to reach another dog, a smell, or move forward faster, tension on the lead often gets them there. Every successful pull teaches the same lesson: leaning into the lead makes good things happen.

That is why lead training is not really about 'correcting' pulling. It is about changing the puppy's understanding of how the world works and their motivation to stay close. There are two main steps for loose lead walking:

**Step 1 - Become the gateway to everything rewarding.** Your puppy wants to sniff that hedge? They can get there through you. They want to keep moving forward? That happens when they stay near you, not when they drag you behind them. You need to regularly mark and reward all loose lead steps to promote learning. When the lead tightens: 1. Stop moving, 2. Wait for slack, 3. Mark & reward at your side, 4. Continue walking.

**Step 2 - Pulling must stop paying off.** If the puppy pulls and still reaches the exciting thing, the behaviour has been reinforced. That is why consistency matters. Every walk is a lesson. A loose lead moves the walk forward. A tight lead pauses access to the environment. Over time, the puppy learns that tension on the lead is actually the slowest and least effective strategy.

The major caveat to this method is that stopping and starting on walks every time your dog pulls is not enough (and will quickly make you both tired and frustrated). You have to make sure your dog can focus, is not overaroused\*, and that you have completed step 1 with your dog's needs in mind. (\*For more info on overarousal, check our training blog)

What does meeting your dog's needs mean? It means providing structured outlets for their natural behaviour. This varies by breed and by dog. For Spaniels, it usually means hunting and retrieving. For Labrador retrievers, it may mean impulse control and gun dog games. For Dachshunds, scentwork and digging opportunities. For sighthounds - chasing.

This approach also changes your role in the dog's mind. Instead of being the person constantly restraining them, you become the person who gives them their job and helps them succeed.

You will no longer be fighting a losing battle with the environment. You will have a content dog who is motivated to walk close to you, because you reliably open the door to what they value.

Good lead walking is therefore less about obedience and more about clarity. When these patterns become predictable, loose lead walking becomes reliable. No one is perfect - some environments are very exciting & adolescence reduces impulse control. If your walk turns into a tug-of-war, keep calm and start again another day. Progress is rarely linear.