Leash Training Without Pulling

Starting With A Puppy

When first introducing leash training, start by allowing the pup to lead you to sniff and explore outside. As you begin to lead, every pup will initially resist. Give a tug to get him started, then try to get him to follow by leg patting and calling. If he still refuses, pick him up for a few feet, then put him down and keep moving. Praise any positive, ignore negatives.

If he takes the leash, don't allow him to lead you. It is OK to allow him to bring you the leash, but if he has it in his mouth while walking, you have less control in an emergency, and it encourages him to consider chewing the leash later. There are several methods to keep the leash out of his mouth.

- Scold and remove the leash from his mouth. (The problem here is that you have to be present.)
- Soak the leash in Biter Apple or other safe repellent. (Tends to be messy.)
- Jerk the leash during mouthing without saying anything. The idea here is to make the leash itself unpredictable. You want the dog to think it is unpleasant to have it in his mouth because at any moment it might jerk his head. This teaches the dog to not grab or chew the leash even if you are not present. This also saves money on replacing chewed leashes.

Head Halters

A relatively new alternative for solving pulling on the leash is use of a canine head halter. This halter loops over the nose and behind the ears similar to a halter on a horse. The advantage is that by controlling the direction of the head, you easily eliminate pulling without choking the dog. Head halters take a while for the dog to accept, so make it fun and keep going.

Adult Dogs

While walking, if he begins to pull, say, "Fido, EASY!", then turn and walk in a different direction. Do this every time until he walks without pulling. You may not make much forward progress at first, but the dog has to learn he will get there faster if he doesn't pull on the leash.

A second benefit of the "Change Direction" approach is that the dog is constantly reminded that you are the leader. You lead every time you decide to change directions.

The Heel Command

This is a much more advanced event than merely not pulling on a leash. The ideal heel is where the dog is off leash, and walks immediately at your LEFT side. He matches your pace, and looks at you whenever you stop.

This command is best learned in a formal class from an obedience instructor. You are less likely to start bad habits. In addition, the distractions of the other people and dogs in an obedience class make the command more reliable. The dog also learns to follow the command in different locations.

If you want a home-made version, the basic idea is to start on-leash and insist the dog walks immediately at your side. Praise while he is doing it, and correct him when he "forges" (moves ahead of you). The idea is that for you to turn left, your dog has to be back far enough for you to turn in front of him.

As he strays from the correct position, use the “Change Direction” technique. If you turn and change, he will need to catch up and pay more attention.

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