

Dog: Loose-Leash Walking



Benefit

This exercise, also called “red light/green light,” teaches your dog that pulling on leash is not the way to get anywhere. The only way for him to make forward progress is to control his sled-dog impulses.

Goal

When you have successfully taught your dog this exercise, you’ll be able to have him explore and sniff during a walk, but still stay within the limits of a six-foot leash. No excessive pulling.

What You Need

- Treats or a toy that gets your dog’s attention.
- A six-foot leash (not a Flexi leash).
- A large yard or empty parking lot for practicing.
- Ten minutes two times daily.

How to Train It

Step 1. Begin walking.

Step 2. As soon as the leash gets tight, “Red Light” stop walking as if you had just come to a red light.

Step 3. Wait patiently until your dog gets bored (the reason you’re working in a distraction-free location) and turns to you to see why you’re not moving. As your dog turns, the leash will loosen.

Step 4. The moment the leash goes loose, praise your dog and move forward (green light). If the leash tightens again, stop (red light). Wait for it to go loose again (green light) and continue walking.

Things to Remember

Watch the leash, not the dog. Be ready to stop the moment it goes tight and to walk as soon as it’s loose. It doesn’t matter why the leash went loose—your dog may have sat down to scratch or turned to chase a leaf. What matters is that you teach him that whenever the leash is loose, you will continue walking. When it’s tight, you will stop.

React quickly. When the leash tightens, stop immediately. If you allow even a few steps of pulling before you stop, your message to your dog is unclear. Unless you stop the moment your dog starts to pull, you are rewarding the pulling and it becomes that much more difficult to teach loose-leash walking.

Tips

- If necessary, prompt your dog by calling his name or talking to him to encourage a loose leash while you’re walking. Keep in mind that your dog’s normal walking speed is faster than yours. This alone makes it difficult for him not to pull.
- Keep practicing loose-leash walking two or three times a day for 10 minutes at a time until your dog is an expert at the exercise. In the meantime, to help you be consistent in your training, use a head halter like a gentle leader whenever you walk your dog to discourage pulling on the leash.
- Never use a flexi leash; the flexi leash actually gives to a pulling dog and teaches him to pull.