

Loose Leash Walking

Equipment required

- 6' leash
- High-value treats
- Conditioned clicker or verbal reward marker
- Optional: conditioned Easy-Walk harness or head halter

Choose to heel

1. For this exercise, you need to start in a low-distraction, fenced yard.
2. Grab some treats and have your furry friend off leash. Begin to walk around; if your pooch chooses you and begins to walk at your side, mark and reward – it's that simple!
3. You can make this game harder by picking up your pace or quickly changing direction. This builds your dog's desire to be with you. It also increases the likelihood your dog will choose you in a new and exciting environment. Working a heel off leash also makes it much easier to transition to on leash! Play this game for 5 minutes every day and you'll be loving the results.
4. After your dog gets an idea of the game, add the leash, marking and rewarding whenever they are walking nicely beside you.



Easy turns

1. This exercise is best practised initially by having the dog on a longer line, e.g. 12', but do so in a very quiet, safely enclosed space, such as a fenced yard.
2. Begin by walking in a straight line no longer than 10-15'. Allow the dog to walk ahead and hold the leash with only one hand, do not steer with the other.
3. Before the dog reaches the end of the leash, make a nice easy U-turn in the other direction and call them to you (use their name, whistle, pat your side – be encouraging!). When they reach your side, mark (click or verbal) and reward with a high-value treat. We are not pulling the dog; they are choosing to come to us.
4. Continue walking in that direction and before your dog reaches the end of the leash, make another easy turn and repeat the protocol.
5. When the dog begins to understand that walking at your side has benefits (no pressure on the collar and tasty food), you'll find that they spend less and less time away from you and more time with you. Once the dog is able to stick beside you for several feet, you can shift to variable reinforcement, marking and rewarding sporadically as you walk.
6. Once the dog is consistently walking on a loose leash at your side in this space, you can gradually shorten up on the long line till you are walking nicely on a 6' length.
7. In future training sessions, you can advance to trying the exercise in an area that has slightly more distraction. Whenever your dog is on a longer line, ensure you have lots of space around you and be watchful of oncoming dogs and people. It is likely your dog will "relapse" because of distractions in the new environment and you may need to go back to a point in the exercise where they are able to pay attention and respond to you.



Step and mark

1. Using a 6' leash, with your dog on your left side and both hands on the leash, take a step or two, and mark and reward while moving.
2. Stop, then mark and reward the dog for being at your side.
3. Immediately, take a step or two forward again, and mark and reward while walking.
4. Then stop, and mark and reward the dog for being at your side. Frequent, steady delivery of food, properly timed, creates a positive incentive for dog to remain at your side while walking!
5. When your dog is reliably stepping and stopping in sync with you, add a cue of "let's go" or another verbal cue.
6. In future training sessions, you can increase the difficulty by practising the exercise in environments with increasingly more distraction. Each time you add distraction, you'll need to lower your criteria, meaning go back to an easier step in the exercise. Eventually, your dog will be able to walk on a loose leash in the busiest of situations.

Treat tip

Always treat your dog while they are at your side, not ahead or in front of you!

