

Rescue Me Canine Training

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Pulling on the Leash

Pulling is typically a result of your dog's focus and eagerness during walks. There are things that capture your dog's attention such as smells or other dogs, or he is just intent on moving forward in the walk. Regardless of his motivation, the problem is that his attention isn't on you. The solution to this problem is to recapture your dog's attention and let him know that he needs to focus on what you are doing during the walk.

In order to do this properly you need to first start with the proper equipment. Ensure you are using a properly fitted martingale collar and a sturdy 6 foot leash. Do not use body harnesses or a retractable leash. You also need to start with the correct state of mind. As in other exercises, you need to ensure you are asking your dog for calmness before you begin. Do not allow your dog to rush out ahead of you at the door or at the gate. He must wait until he is given the command to proceed. It is also crucial that you keep the correct mental attitude during the process. Teaching your dog not to pull can take a lot of repetition. If you become frustrated or impatient during the process you risk losing your dog's cooperation. If you lose your ability to remain calm and relaxed, you are no longer able to teach your dog, so if you find yourself losing your patience, take a break or stop what you are doing and move on to something else. Pick up where you left off at a later time.

In order to get your dog to pay attention to you on walks, you first need to get him to acknowledge you and look at you. Walk as normal and when the dog gets to the end of the leash, call his name, get his attention and change direction getting him to follow and praising him for doing so. Repeat every time he gets to the end of the leash. If necessary use treats to keep his focus. The goal is to teach the dog to stay nearby, anticipate change and watch you for direction. If you need to tug the leash, make the tugs crisp and brief and make sure the leash goes slack immediately after. Never allow your dog to move forward with tension on the leash. Always redirect him, or stop all movement. Extra force in giving corrections does not equal extra obedience. You are only trying to get his attention, not force him to follow.

Eventually your dog will understand that only you are leading and he needs to stay close and pay attention.

Points to Remember

- Ask for calmness when starting out
- Ensure you have the proper mental attitude
 - Use the proper equipment
- Quick tugs and redirection when the dog reaches the end of the leash
 - Praise him for following
- Do not allow him to move forward when there is tension on the leash

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A second useful technique to address pulling on leash is to practise a stop and go approach to walking. This means that whenever the leash is slack you can move forward, but the moment there is any tension on the leash you immediately stop moving, until the leash goes slack. This can be a very frustrating technique for the handler as it takes time for the dog to understand that tension on the leash will cause forward motion to stop. While practising this technique initially you should measure walks by time rather than distance, as not much distance will be covered on the first few walks.

Your dog pulls because pulling is successful. It allows him to get to where he wants to go. In order to stop the behavior you must prevent it from being successful. Successful behavior is continued, unsuccessful behavior is given up.

As mentioned above as soon as tension is put on the leash you must stop any forward movement. Even if your dog is only trying to get to something that is a few inches away, pulling makes the handler stop – every time. Stay still until your dog comes back to you. This point of the process requires patience from the handler. Resist the urge to give commands or tug on the leash. The goal isn't to give the dog commands that he responds to, the goal is for the dog to learn that specific behaviors have a consequence, and to have those consequences guide the dogs choices and behaviors. Basically we want the dog to figure out on his own how to move the handler forward.

Once the dog comes back to the handler, move forward until the dog puts any tension on the leash, then stop and repeat. Often the dog will take a half step back in an effort to move forward. This is not enough effort on the part of the dog. Ensure that you keep tension on the leash until the dog comes back towards you taking the slack off the leash. It isn't necessary for the dog to come back directly beside you, only far enough to put noticeable slack in the leash. Remember, whatever standard you set as the point when you will move forward will be the behavior that is encouraged in your dog.

Even if your dog pulls to smell a tree or post, pulls to get to another dog, regardless of what the destination is, you want your dog to know that you are willing to go see whatever he wants as long as he doesn't drag you there.

You can practise this technique even when you aren't on walks by using toys or treats. Toss a treat a few feet past your dog, beyond what he can reach while on leash. When he gets to the end of the leash, stop dead. Wait until he comes back before moving forward. Ensure the leash is slack all the way to the treat.